



**STANLEY:**

# **BEHIND BARBED WIRE**

Jean Gittins

Hong Kong University Press

## **STANLEY: Behind Barbed Wire**



# Stanley: Behind Barbed Wire

Jean Gittins

Hong Kong University Press



© *Hong Kong University Press, 1982*  
ISBN 962-209-061-3

Printed by Nordica Printing Co.  
16 Westlands Road, 2/Fl., Flat C  
Melbourne Industrial Building, Hong Kong

# **Contents**

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Prologue</i>	1
<i>Chapter One</i>	7
<i>Chapter Two</i>	21
<i>Chapter Three</i>	27
<i>Chapter Four</i>	42
<i>Chapter Five</i>	55
<i>Chapter Six</i>	64
<i>Chapter Seven</i>	69
<i>Chapter Eight</i>	83
<i>Chapter Nine</i>	89
<i>Chapter Ten</i>	98
<i>Chapter Eleven</i>	114
<i>Chapter Twelve</i>	119
<i>Chapter Thirteen</i>	126
<i>Chapter Fourteen</i>	134
<i>Chapter Fifteen</i>	147
<i>Epilogue</i>	156

*When to the Sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past  
William Shakespeare, Sonnets, 30.*

## ***Foreword***

The passage of more than thirty years has neither dimmed the writer's recollection nor cast any false glamour upon these events as she recalls them. Indeed this would be a melancholy account of unrelieved hardship and suffering were it not illuminated by the insight the reader is afforded into the courage, endurance and unselfishness with which so many of those confined in the Stanley Camp responded to the long grim challenge of internment.

Jean Gittins' approach to this difficult subject is one of objectivity and restraint. The facts are allowed to speak for themselves with little embroidery and no flights of dramatic fancy or psychological speculation. Nowhere does she even state in so many words the simple fact, surely known to every soul in the camp except the younger children, that survival was by no means to be taken for granted by any captive of the Japanese armed forces. Nevertheless the reader is not left unaware, as the tale unfolds, of the backdrop of tension and danger against which these scenes were played.

I am sure this book will be welcomed as filling one of the gaps in the record of war-time Hong Kong.

D.R. Holmes

Hong Kong



## ***Preface***

In the thirty-odd years since the end of the Second World War, I have answered many questions and given more than one account of our experiences in Hong Kong's Stanley Camp where civilians were interned. There was so much to tell and people never seemed to tire of asking but, try as I might, it was impossible to present a picture sufficiently graphic to show things as they were.

Since the publication of my memoirs in 1969<sup>1</sup> requests have come for more information. One reviewer went so far as to advise that the chapter 'The Years in Stanley' be expanded to form the subject of another book, and indeed I was further encouraged by an American student at the University of Hong Kong who was making a post-graduate study of Stanley Camp<sup>2</sup>. It was apparent that interest had by no means abated, but on taking a fresh look at things past their delineation appeared less sharp – the intervening years had softened remembrances of the harsh conditions under which we lived. Clearly the time had come for the facts to be recorded.

This work embraces the hundred-year growth of colonial Hong Kong, my own family background, the eighteen-day battle against Japanese invaders, and the period of uncertainty immediately following. These are followed by sketches of camp life – how things happened and how we behaved. It was strange how internment drew out the best in so many, although there were others who reacted in manner so far removed from their normal behaviour that they could scarcely be recognized. The sketches in general are grouped according to related subject matter and not governed by sequence of time. The epilogue gives a brief picture of Hong Kong as we found it just after liberation.

Ex-fellow internees will doubtless vouch for the truth of my presentation, although those who still harbour bitter memories may feel that it is over-restrained. Some readers who did not share in our experience might regard it as fiction or, at the very least, an exaggerated account. I merely claim it to be a faithful if sober record

of some of the things that I personally experienced. The fact that so many came through with so little permanent damage to physical or mental health speaks only for the magnitude of human endurance. Personally, I had the good fortune to be with understanding friends: this and the fact that I joined the camp voluntarily possibly governed my outlook and enabled me to adapt to conditions in a more philosophical frame of mind. I should add that in reviving the haunting memories of our long struggle for survival I savoured again the spirit of comradeship which made it possible for so many to pull through.

To the many friends who so readily and generously responded to my appeals for assistance I feel a deep sense of gratitude. Their enthusiastic co-operation in tracing details which time had dimmed enabled me to rebuild a story whose well-defined features made recounting a happy pastime. To enumerate their names would be tedious to many readers – moreover, I have thanked each one by letter. A general expression of appreciation here is nevertheless not out of place.

I am indebted to other writers for their publications. In isolated instances the source of information has been acknowledged by a footnote. The account of the Battle for Hong Kong is based on the official record of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps<sup>3</sup>. John Luff's<sup>4,5</sup> two books gave a postwar observer's portrait of general conditions in Hong Kong during and after the Japanese occupation. Sincere thanks are due to Professor William G. Sewell<sup>6</sup> and to John Stericker<sup>7</sup> for their contributions to the literature of the time. John Stericker's work was of particular significance because, as Administrative Secretary of the camp, he was in possession of a ready-made almanac of events as they happened, besides information withheld from the rest of us, possibly for our own good. His publication, based on material collected over the years and buried for safekeeping during the last six months of internment, constitutes what might be termed an unofficial 'official' record.

Access to *The Hong Kong News*<sup>8</sup> was granted by the University of Hong Kong during recent visits to the colony. *The Hong Kong News* was the only English-language newspaper published during the occupation and a complete set of issues is held in the University's main library. The value of my study was infinitely heightened by Professor L.K. Young's encouragement and generosity. Given the privilege of constant access to the Professor's

time and to the facilities of the History Department, I happily lived once more in a student atmosphere. Dr Alan Birch's guidance in the final stages and his help with the submission of my manuscript is most gratefully acknowledged.

I was fortunate also to have had the friendship of Geoffrey Emerson, whose academic researches in the same department enabled him to right many of my inaccuracies. Lately I have been given a copy of his completed thesis. To my friend, Mavis Thorpe Clark, of Melbourne, I am deeply indebted. Despite heavy calls on her as an active author, and many family commitments, she found the time to read, discuss and guide the faltering steps of a novice writer in the best traditions of her concept of International P.E.N. fellowship. As much by her encouragement, as by the criticisms of both Mavis and Geoffrey Emerson, my presentation is infinitely better than it would otherwise have been.

Finally I have to thank my talented niece, Wendy Yeo, for her drawings. Her lively interpretation of camp life, even though she saw it only through my descriptions, will add interest to the reader and fill in the gaps my pen was unable to portray.

J.G.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gittins, J., *Eastern Windows – Western Skies* (Hong Kong, South China Morning Post, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> Emerson, G.C., *Stanley Internment Camp, Hong Kong, 1942-1945: a Study of Civilian Internment during the Second World War* (Hong Kong, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> *A Record of the Actions of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps in the Battle for Hong Kong, December 1941* (Hong Kong, 1953).

<sup>4</sup> Luff, J., *The Hidden Years, Hong Kong, 1941-1945* (Hong Kong, 1967).

<sup>5</sup> Luff, J., *Hong Kong Cavalcade* (Hong Kong, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Sewell, W.G., *Strange Harmony* (London, 1946).

<sup>7</sup> Stericker, J., *A Tear for the Dragon* (London, 1958).

<sup>8</sup> *The Hong Kong News* (Hong Kong, December 1941 – August 1945).





## ***Prologue***

Saturday, 21 February 1942. It had dawned a cold and dull morning with a touch of Scotch mist so typical of the Chinese New Year weather we had in February. It was not the day, then, that was remarkable, but the circumstances in which I found myself. For one thing, although the lunar New Year was only days old, I heard no sign of festivity, not even the odd firecracker. For another, I had awakened not at home but at the University of Hong Kong, although the University was no longer a university – it was a relief hospital. Strangest of all was the fact that I was about to submit to internment in a Japanese camp for enemy aliens, a step which was to determine, indeed to alter, the entire course of my future.

Our internment was perhaps the inevitable outcome of world events not only of the past twelve months but a build-up of trouble in China over decades. A year before, my husband W.M. (Billy) Gittins and I had had our children with us – Elizabeth, a responsible ten-year-old, and John, a mere youngster of five. We lived in the pleasant suburb of Kowloon Tong, about two miles from the city of Kowloon, at the foot of the hills on the mainland across the harbour from Hong Kong Island. Behind the hills the New Territories stretched northwards to the Chinese border. Billy and I had both come from large families. We had a wide circle of friends. Now friends and families were bereaved and separated; our children were in Australia; Billy was a prisoner of war. I was alone.

The immediate cause of our situation was Japan's invasion and subsequent occupation of Hong Kong during the Second World War. To observers in the Far East, Japanese plans for political and physical expansion had long been apparent, even before her flagrant occupation of China's Manchurian provinces in 1931 at a time when China, weakened by years of internal strife, was in no position to defend herself. Moreover, Japan's seizure of Peiping (Peking) in 1937, in an attempt to detach further territory, so enraged the Chinese nation that factional interests and ideological differences

were set aside to present a united front against an enemy common to all.

No one expected China's resistance to be anything other than nominal. The odds against her were too heavy: her poorly equipped and inexperienced soldiers were no match against the combined might of Japan's army, navy and airforce. Nevertheless, the Chinese defence stood firm – mainly around the Shanghai area – for over three months, a feat which drew surprised admiration, mixed with some uneasiness, in Hong Kong, especially when refugees began to move southwards in a long continuous stream.

Valour and steadfastness notwithstanding, the dogged defence finally bowed to superior strength. The Chinese slowly withdrew 1,200 miles westwards to Chungking, pursuing in their retreat a 'scorched earth' policy. This was to lure the enemy deeper into China in order to over-extend Japanese supply lines. The Japanese turned south towards Canton. When that city fell in October 1938 they were only ninety miles from Hong Kong. The precariousness of Hong Kong's situation was all too apparent, although an attitude of complacency prevailed: we were a British Crown Colony – they would never dare touch us.

Hong Kong is a small island situated on the southeast coast of China. Its closest neighbours are Canton (Kwangchow), capital of Kwangtung province, ninety miles to the northwest, and Macau, a Portuguese colony, forty miles to the west. The colony's total land area covers 403 square miles of which Hong Kong Island, together with a cluster of tiny islands, cover approximately twenty square miles. Kowloon, a small peninsula on the tip of the Chinese mainland, and Stonecutters Island comprise about four square miles of the total, whilst the New Territories, to the north of Kowloon's boundary, with several larger and over two hundred smaller islands, make up the balance with 370 square miles.

The colony's economic heart is its magnificent natural harbour which lies between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Point. The twin cities of Victoria, the capital, situated on the Island, and Kowloon on the mainland flank the harbour on either side. Ocean-going merchantmen and naval vessels, carrying flags of all nations, dwarf the launches, junks and sampans and ply its waterways at all times making it an exceptionally busy centre.

Although archaeological evidence<sup>1</sup> shows Hong Kong to have been inhabited from early times, it remained sparsely populated

until the nineteenth century when it had the reputation of being a haunt of smugglers and pirates. Occasional small villages maintained a simple livelihood by fishing and cultivating the scanty soil in the valleys between low-lying hills or on coastal fringes of the rocky terrain. Not until after it became a British colony did Hong Kong's population grow. It is no wonder that Lord Palmerston, Queen Victoria's Foreign Secretary in 1841, described it contemptuously as 'a barren island with hardly a house upon it'.

China's trade with the West had begun with Portugal early in the sixteenth century. By 1557 the Portuguese had established themselves at Macau, which they claimed as a colony in return for assistance given to China in the suppression of piracy. The first English trading ship of the East India Company sailed out in 1699 and was followed tentatively by those of other nations. By the end of the next century Britain had dominated all foreign trade. Business was conducted in Canton, but foreigners were forced to make their homes in Macau, because traders alone were allowed in Canton, and then only during the trading season. Conditions were altogether unsatisfactory, mainly because of the conflict of dissimilar civilizations; furthermore, the Chinese regarded themselves as the only civilized people, treating all others as barbarians and subjecting the traders to humiliating personal restrictions such as being confined to the factory area and forbidden to learn the Chinese language. There was, however, mutual trust in the conduct of trade: tea and silk were freely exchanged for silver and the spoken word was sufficient for even the largest transactions.

A sad circumstance of trade with the West was the introduction of opium into China. Britain was the main culprit and this arose from the fact that English people became so strongly addicted to drinking tea that tax on the tea trade alone provided almost one-tenth of the government's annual income, and importers were obliged to carry a whole year's stock in case of shipping delays.

All would have been well had Britain not run out of silver, but her supply had been depleted by wars with America and France. An offer of goods in exchange for tea was refused by the Chinese Emperor, who claimed that China had everything it needed and nothing but specie was acceptable. An impasse developed, but Britain found a solution: the introduction of opium, of which there was a plentiful supply from India. The Chinese peasant in particular took to smoking opium even more religiously than the English took

to drinking tea, and from 1800 onwards opium was traded in ever-increasing quantities. Thirty years later other foreign countries had joined in the lucrative practice, and instead of silver flowing into China it now poured out. Worse still was the demoralizing effect on its people from dependence on the drug. The government placed a ban on its import but the long Chinese coastline provided ideal conditions for smuggling, and corrupt officials in Canton connived at the illicit trade. A letter of protest sent to Queen Victoria never reached her and her government turned a blind eye – even the clergy in Britain rationalized the immorality of drug trafficking because they argued that contact with Western missionaries, who often assisted the smugglers, would save heathen souls.

Peking appointed a viceroy to Canton – a man known for his integrity and determination – with orders to stamp out the evil practice. He acted swiftly, and within a week had laid siege to the foreign factories, stopping all supplies until a demand that all stocks of opium be surrendered was met. After six weeks the traders gave in, and a total of 20,283 chests were destroyed.

A dispirited British community retired to Macau only to be told by the Portuguese governor that he could not be responsible for their safety, so they took refuge in British ships sheltered in the harbour of nearby Hong Kong. This was the summer of 1839 and the beginning of the Opium War, which really consisted of only a few expeditions and skirmishes. China lost. In the negotiations which followed, the British government demanded as compensation the cession of Hong Kong Island where its people could live in safety under their own flag. China had no option but to agree. On 26 January 1841, a British naval detachment landed on Possession Point to hoist the Union Jack, and a tiny fragment of the great Celestial Empire was formally declared a British Crown Colony for 999 years.

A small garrison was immediately stationed in Stanley on the south of the Island and the Royal Navy established a base. Kowloon and Stonecutter's Island were added under similar terms twenty years later, but the lease of the New Territories was not signed until 1898 and for a period of only ninety-nine years. It is the prospect of this lease's expiry at the end of this century that gives rise to so much world speculation, although the people of Hong Kong have never been unduly concerned.

In spite of early problems of typhoons and fever, the growth of the new colony was never in doubt. An unexpected inflow of

Chinese from the mainland thrived under a liberal British colonial rule. The population rose in ten years from about 6,000 to over 30,000 in 1851. By 1931 it was well over 800,000.

With the increase in population, there was a growth of commercial development. Hong Kong became a centre for Chinese emigration and, lying as it did on China's doorstep, was in a unique position to carry on entrepôt activities between China and Chinese communities abroad as well as with the West. So rapid was its progress, that long before it celebrated its first centenary in 1941 the Crown Colony had become a naval base of real importance and took its place as one of the world's leading ports.

Hong Kong's administration followed the Crown Colony pattern: it was headed by a governor, nominated by Whitehall, who was the Queen's representative and the actual head of the local government in which his principal adviser and chief executive officer was the Colonial Secretary. There were nominated Executive and Legislative Councils with official and unofficial members. The first Chinese member was nominated to the Legislative Council in 1880 and to the Executive Council in 1926. Government policy was to treat Hong Kong as a marketplace where all were free to come and go. The principle of equality of all races in the eyes of the law was adopted as early as 1865.

Public utility services – gas, electricity and electric trams – were developed. The business sector was centred in Victoria on a narrow strip of level land at the foot of Victoria Peak. Residential areas sprung up on the mid-levels overlooking the harbour, and when the Peak Tramways Company built the funicular railway in 1880, it opened up a haven for those who wished to escape the city's heat during the summer months. Few lived in Kowloon in the early days – it was used mainly as a military cantonment. Not until regular ferry services were established did development follow. In 1910 the Kowloon Canton Railway was completed to form a direct link with Canton.

The railway gave easier access to parts of the New Territories, but most of it remained a peaceful agricultural countryside stretching from Kowloon to the Sumchun River which formed the border with China. Ancient villages, some of whose lineage may be traced back to the eleventh century, dotted the plains. A range of high hills in the centre gave the low-lying country some character. Within the valleys of this range Hong Kong's main reservoir and water

catchment system was constructed.

Hong Kong grew and prospered in spite of political upheavals in China, and envious eyes were cast frequently in its direction. As a result of the war between China and Japan in 1937, a mass flight of refugees flooded in. An estimated 750,000 entered the colony in three years bringing the total population to 1,600,000. At the height of the influx it was estimated that half a million people slept on the streets.

---

<sup>1</sup>*Hong Kong 1973* (Hong Kong Government Press, 1973).

## ***Chapter One***

When the Second World War broke out in Europe in 1939, it did little to disrupt Hong Kong's normal routine, but after the Allied retreat from Dunkirk in May 1940, the realization came that if, or rather when, trouble reached the colony no help from Britain could be expected.

Preparations against such an emergency, begun in a somewhat desultory fashion after the Munich crisis and the fall of Canton in 1938, assumed a more urgent note. Four regiments of regular troops were stationed in the colony but many of its residents, eager to help in the defence of their home and country, now enlisted in the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps (HKVDC) which adopted a more active training programme. My husband, Billy, had joined a year before. Always a realist, he said he wished to be ready when the time came. A great deal of publicity had been drawn to air-raid precautions. Renewed lectures were given, practical training sessions intensified, and work on the construction of tunnels for shelters for the masses was speeded up. The Medical Department was deeply involved in an extensive programme. A scheme for the clearing of major government hospitals for the treatment of mass casualties necessitated planning for large institutions to be converted into relief hospitals at a moment's notice to take care of patients who were not casualties. Other institutions nearer the expected fields of action were to be casualty clearing stations. Staffing and equipment and related supportive bodies had to be worked out. Organizations for the control of transport, supplies and general civilian care were formed. Most urgent of all was a sudden announcement by the government in July ordering the registration of British women and children for immediate departure to Australia. The order was addressed to civilians as well as to service personnel; only persons engaged in the essential services were exempt. This made no secret of the view taken by those in authority of the seriousness of the situation. The colony was really shaken out of its complacency but,



as few wished to be evacuated, there was an immediate rush to join any organization which might provide an excuse to stay.

The question of who was 'British' created doubt in some quarters and downright dismay in others. Although anyone born in the colony was legally entitled to British nationality and was eligible for a British passport, mention of Australia raised at once the question of her White Australia policy and enquiries at registration centres threw no light on the matter. Official announcements were purposely camouflaged to give us to understand that it concerned everyone but, in actual fact, the order applied only to those of 'pure' British descent. And yet the Volunteers, for instance, had been told specifically that, in the event of hostilities, they would be regarded as service personnel and promises had been made that their families would be taken care of in the same way as those of regular troops. However, the fact remained that a large number did not come under the heading of *pure* British descent.

Of Hong Kong's one and a half million cosmopolitan population<sup>1</sup> the Chinese comprised ninety-eight per cent. For the rest, European nationals, including Americans, totalled about 11,500, with over 7,000 Indians, 3,000 Macau Portuguese and about 1,000 others. Included among the Chinese and Europeans was the local Eurasian community, people of a mixed Anglo-Chinese heritage, most of whom claimed Chinese nationality whilst many regarded themselves as British. The tragedy of it all was that until after the Second World War, when so many of the local community died for the Allied cause, racial discrimination was such that they were accepted by neither British nor Chinese, although the Chinese were not so discourteous as to disclaim them.

Both Billy's family and mine were of this community. My father, although a British knight of many years' standing, held very strong views on the subject. He and others who thought likewise threw in their lot wholeheartedly with the Chinese. The Gittinses, on the other hand, took a more tolerant attitude. Other people's opinions did not worry them – they accepted the situation of their birth, lived their own lives and were the happier for it. Neither Billy's sisters, three of whom had husbands in the HKVDC, nor I regarded the registration order as being applicable to us, but many of our friends adopted the view that they were families of service personnel, obeyed the summons to register and within a few days had sailed. On reaching Manila, evacuees were divided into two groups: those

of pure European descent were sent on to Australia; the Eurasian families were returned to Hong Kong. It was then explained that Australia could not be persuaded to give them refuge even in the event of open war. Thus a delicate situation was handled with bungling indelicacy. It did much to damage the morale of the local Volunteers.

My own position as far as the registration problem was concerned had been perfectly clear. I knew that as family of a member of the HKVDC our children and I would become the responsibility of the British government in the event of hostilities but, until such a situation occurred, we were entirely responsible for ourselves. Moreover, I was my father's daughter and, irrespective of any influence he might have in Hong Kong, the fact of his claim to Chinese nationality would automatically rule out the possibility of my entry into Australia.

My father, Sir Robert Ho Tung, was born into a family of humble circumstances when Hong Kong had been a British colony for over two decades. It had overcome its early difficulties and was on the way to being Britain's principal outpost in the Far East. The early years had been a period of preparation: public utilities and medical and health services were developed; schools, hospitals, police stations and churches were built; banking, shipping, dockyard, and even shipbuilding facilities had been established. In this healthy economic climate commercial enterprises flourished.

As a boy my father attended the Central School, the leading educational institution which was later renamed Queen's College. He had a Chinese upbringing but learnt English at school. He told us that lessons began at 6 a.m. in the summer and at 6.30 during the winter months. His mother gave him five cash (half of one cent) each day for his lunch. He would spend two or three cash only on some small bite to allay his hunger – the rest would be saved. This habit of resolute frugality was to remain a guiding principle in future business dealings.

He began adult life as a schoolteacher but soon left to join the Chinese Maritime Customs in Canton where he first came into contact with the foreign business community. He was at once interested in and greatly attracted to the world of commerce for which he seemed to have a natural propensity. Leaving the Chinese Maritime Customs, he accepted a junior position with Jardine, Matheson and Company, a firm which had led the foreign traders

for half a century. Father's knowledge of English together with his innate intelligence proved invaluable as a liaison between the Company and the Chinese. He rose to be Chinese Manager before he was thirty, and, indeed, his association with the 'Princely Hong' (*hong* is the Chinese name for a large firm) lasted throughout his long career.

Father knew what he wanted from life and possessed the ability and perseverance to get it. Besides, his connection with Jardine's offered plenty of scope for foresight and judgment – it was a time when opportunity begged at one's door. From his humble background he became the doyen of the Eurasian community and was made a Justice of the Peace in 1899 at the age of 35. The onset of poor health at this stage curtailed his activities. He developed a mysterious digestive ailment – a form of sprue – which was thought to have been caused by prolonged deprivation of a proper diet during adolescence. It was almost to cost him his life. However, with Mother's care and devotion, and his own indomitable spirit, he recovered sufficiently to carry out business commitments, although he was forced to lead the rest of his life as a semi-invalid.

As a result of this curtailment of activities he declined to serve on the Legislative Council when invited to do so, but gave his services liberally whenever they were sought at top-level conferences, or he would act as personal adviser to the Governor-in-Council. The wealth which came to him at an early age made him a ready and generous benefactor to the community generally. He was the first private citizen to donate a school for children of mixed parentage. Other educational institutions, including the University of Hong Kong, benefited from his philanthropy. He was human enough to take pleasure in any recognition given to him and one of his more satisfying honours was a degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa* from the University. For his services to Britain he was created Knight Bachelor by King George V in 1915, and later in 1955 Queen Elizabeth II conferred on him the further honour of Knight of the British Empire. Nor did his donations to relief work in China and his help to the Portuguese administration in Macau escape recognition by their respective governments. In business, his acumen ensured success in his dealings, yet he was esteemed and respected by all friends and associates; he held directorships in many of the leading business houses where his foresight and judgment were keenly sought.

My mother, Lady Clara, was a remarkable woman and a most conscientious parent. Father had a large house on the mid-levels overlooking the harbour, but as the children arrived Mother was not at all happy about the prospect of their growing up in the heat of Hong Kong's summer months. Someone had told her that there was nothing to match the health-giving properties of the Peak air for young children, so Father had no rest until he had obtained special permission from the Governor-in-Council (necessary until after the Second World War) for a Chinese family to live in that exclusive residential district. Father bought a cluster of three houses from a retiring businessman: two, separated by tennis courts on two levels, for the family and a large staff of servants, and one for his own use. The move was made in 1907. There were altogether ten children in our family, seven girls and three boys, one of whom died in infancy. The last three, including myself, were born after moving to the Peak.

In spite of the fresh air and exclusiveness, living facilities on the Peak were understandably primitive. Braving these conditions would have tried the spirit of anyone, but for a woman with a large family of young children it needed true courage. The isolation alone must have been frightening, for access, other than walking, was by the funicular railway which gave an infrequent service. Here the amenities stopped. Roads were little more than footpaths and travel between tram terminus and home was made by sedan chair for which we kept our own staff of coolies. There was not a single shop or even a small store in the entire district so that every simple need had to be procured from town. Refrigeration and sewerage were dreams of the future; cooking was done by wood or by coal and gas was used for all lighting including street lamps. Added to this was the problem of fog which was particularly heavy during the summer months and sometimes, for days on end, humidity would remain at saturation point and visibility reduced to no more than a few feet.

But no problem proved insuperable nor task too great for Mother if it meant that our health or education would benefit. She aimed at giving us the best of both cultures. To help her achieve this she brought into the family a Chinese master and an English governess. These two exerted a strong influence on our daily lives and we grew up in pleasant rural surroundings, spending our time between learning the rudiments of a general English education as dispensed by our governess and studying elementary Chinese

classics under the Old Master. Twice a week we had piano lessons from a French lady who spent Wednesday and Saturday afternoons devoting a halfhour to each child.

Life was not all work and no play. Even though we were the only Chinese family to live on the Peak, with so many of us, we never felt lonely. We had cats and a dog each and kept a pair of goats – they were to have been slaughtered but Mother, being a devout Buddhist and against killing, offered them a home. Someone told her that riding was good for posture so she imported two donkeys from north China. On arrival they were fitted with saddles and bridles at the Hong Kong Jockey Club stables. Whenever we went riding we were the envy of the other children on the Peak. The donkeys were often lent to charitable organizations where they were a special attraction at garden fêtes.

We had little contact with the neighbouring children and only met those whose governesses were friends of ours. During our afternoon walks the governesses would sit together while we children played hopscotch on the pavement or games on the hillside not far away. I do not remember ever having been invited to any of their homes. They had no intention, I am sure, of being unkind, although they would on occasion suddenly refuse to play with us because we were Chinese, or they might tell us we shouldn't be living on the Peak. Whenever this happened, our governess would pick up her knitting and take us home, telling us stories on the way, hoping to soothe any hurt we might have suffered.

There were day-long walking picnics organized by the Old Master, outings in which Mother sometimes joined. These hikes were entertaining and instructive as the Old Master rather prided himself on his knowledge of natural history, on which he expounded as we went along. His ability to forecast weather conditions was quite remarkable and, indeed, I cannot recall a single occasion when we were caught in the rain. We were always accompanied on these outings by two coolies who carried the lunches, raincoats and extra woollies as well as a light chairlift in case of accidents or if Mother or one of us younger ones could not quite make the distance and had to be assisted.

The older children played tennis. When the court was not in use we roller-skated. Mother had been advised that the best exercise of all was swimming, so Father had to borrow the company launch for her to take us to some nearby beach. Later she had a motor yacht

built to her own requirements and we would spend weekends on board. After the tragic sinking of a Macau ferry, with heavy loss of life, she arranged for a professional to give us swimming lessons. However, the highlight of our activities was Chinese opera of which Mother herself was passionately fond. We would be taken to a *matinée* or to a Saturday night performance and would find ourselves thoroughly fascinated by some historical or legendary presentation in which virtue always triumphed over evil. The cast was usually all male but occasionally there would be a female troupe. The impersonation in either case was superb, the costumes consistently extravagant and always in the correct style of the period. Each troupe carried its own orchestra and instruments – gongs, drums, cymbals, bells and various strings. The noise, especially when depicting something exciting like a battle scene, would be deafening. There would be little or no scenery, but from the perfect action of the players little imagination was needed on the part of the audience to know what it was all about.

The Peak houses were built of timber and simply designed with wide enclosed verandahs, the windows of which rattled at the slightest breeze throughout the night – and yet they were strong enough to withstand the typhoons. These came with terrific force and steady regularity from June until November each year. The summers were long and very trying and, especially during our early years, Mother would take us away to one of the seaside resorts in the north to escape the heat, until the First World War and German raiders on the China Sea put an end to this type of holiday.

We lived on the south side of the Island overlooking Deep Water Bay and Repulse Bay. Our view may not have been as exciting as that of houses facing the harbour where there was a constant movement of ships, but to us on the ocean side, with its magnificent panorama, each variation in shade and colour of land, sea and sky brought fresh and unending interest. At dusk and in the moonlight the outlines of bays and islands were strangely softened yet clearly defined and we would linger on the lawn until fishing lights shone in the calm waters below us like earthly stars.

Because of Father's business commitments and his indifferent health, Mother had the main responsibility of our upbringing. We had to practise humbleness and courtesy to all people at all times and were taught to be frugal because, she often said, our future husbands might not be as well off as Father and she did not want us

to feel the difference. I don't know about the others but I, for one, was totally unaware of Father's financial status and, as we were given all we needed, there was no reason to think about such things. The result was that I never learnt the value of money, although our frugal upbringing certainly taught me how to make a little go a long way in later life.

We saw little of Father during these years, but sometimes on a Sunday he would send for us and, when we were assembled in his drawing room, he would come in and sit down. As we approached him in single file, we would be shaken gently by the hand and given a parental kiss. He always accorded us the same courtesy he gave to visitors. I can still recall the slim elegant figure of those days, the frailness of his physique, his long blue Chinese gown and short black jacket with jade buttons, and his delicate and very smooth hands. If at any time he was displeased with us he would not show it but left it to Mother to correct us. I can remember only one occasion when he disciplined anyone himself. He had received a complaint from the Peak tram inspector about my brother Robbie having been rude to him. Father took this very much to heart. He sent for us all, lectured us on propriety in conduct and then, to our amazement, he picked up a cane and gave Robbie several strokes on each hand.

The time came in 1917 when Grace, two years my junior, and I joined our elder sisters in their daily journey to school in Kowloon. Kowloon was being developed and the Diocesan Girls' School had moved over there in 1913, when space still allowed unhampered expansion in as yet rural surroundings. The school had been established in 1860 by the Church Missionary Society for European and Eurasian girls. By 1904 it had so prospered that it was mentioned in the Government Report of that year as being one of the five most important grant-in-aid schools in the colony.

Going to school in Kowloon meant leaving home at 7.30 a.m. with several changes in transport. The Peak roads had been improved sufficiently to take light vehicular traffic and rickshaws were replacing the sedan chair, but it was still a long journey by rickshaw, Peak tram, ferry and rickshaw again for the last mile along tree-lined Nathan Road on Kowloon side. When the weather was good, we would travel to and from the Peak tram terminus by donkey. We could possibly have gone to the Peak School nearby: although it did not normally admit Chinese children, Father might have been granted special permission to send us there had Mother wished it.

Our cousins attended St Stephen's Girls' College in Hong Kong. It was *the* school for daughters of Chinese gentlemen, but Mother chose the Diocesan Girls' School in Kowloon because she thought it would give us the best English education.

We must have presented an unusual spectacle to our travelling companions on the Peak tram. Mother liked to dress us to match. Unfortunately, she had little idea of what was suitable and, even though our frocks were sometimes made by a dressmaker in town and there were two tailors permanently employed at home, I have since been told that our general appearance was a source of great amusement to the other passengers. No wonder, for I can remember wearing a voile dress trimmed with a pink ribbon in the middle of winter. This was reinforced by a woollen singlet underneath, which had the annoying habit of peeping out from under the voile neckline. To complete the incongruity of the ensemble, I wore brown woollen stockings, held up by garters which were slack enough to allow proper circulation of blood to my legs, inside brown leather boots! Boots were considered necessary because they were good support for our ankles. Hats, whether or not they suited us, were always worn, these being substituted in the summer by sun topees with embroidered linen covers also trimmed with ribbon to match our dresses. Poor Mother, to have been so well intentioned and to have achieved so unfortunate a result. We would not have been so conspicuous had there been only one or two of us but, with four and sometimes more travelling together, we could not fail to attract a good deal of attention and comment.

I enjoyed my schooldays immensely. There were naturally subjects such as Biblical Knowledge about which I knew nothing, but I soon caught up. As well as lessons there were team games like hockey and also the Girl Guides. I left at the end of 1923 having passed the senior examination conducted by the University of Hong Kong. I was naturally anxious to go on to further studies at the University, but as Chinese was not taught at the Diocesan Girls' School my knowledge of the language was not of sufficiently high standard to pass the examination in Chinese literature, and this was a prerequisite for matriculation for students of Chinese nationality. I had to make up for this by attending a Chinese secondary school for two years. Before this, though, there was a trip to London where Father was a Hong Kong delegate to the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, as well as a short visit into China with Mother.



In 1927 Grace and I joined the University. By this time, motor cars could be driven to the Peak although our houses were still beyond the range of the new motor road. Nevertheless, Father gave us a car which we garaged at the Peak tram station, before going on home by rickshaw. Two years later, Father's new house when completed had a special approach road and we could drive right to its door. The two years I spent at the University were the happiest and most carefree of my life, in spite of the fact that it fell to my lot to run the Peak household. Mother had gone to England with our two elder sisters and the others, except Florence, the youngest, were either away or married. But housekeeping was only a nominal duty because the servants who had been with us for many years took over the responsibility and all I had to do was to draw the money from Father's office for wages and general running expenses.

The University of Hong Kong was founded in 1911, but the importance of providing facilities for educating local aspirants in Western medicine had been recognized in the previous century, and the 1880s had seen the establishment of the Hong Kong College of Medicine from which Dr Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Chinese Republic, had graduated. The College became the new University's Faculty of Medicine. There were also Faculties of Engineering and Arts. Grace and I both enrolled as Arts students, reading Letters and Philosophy.

We went through our first year without difficulty. Because of our good grounding at the Diocesan Girls' School we were rather ahead of our contemporaries, so it was possible to indulge in all the extra-mural activities which made those days so memorable. We played a lot of tennis, attended all the dances, and the car gave us easy access to all of Hong Kong's lovely bathing beaches. Throughout the long vacation, swimming was a daily, if not twice-daily, event.

Most memorable of all, I met Billy Gittins.

Billy was on the staff of the Faculty of Engineering and was one of the University's own graduates. As a student he had been an outstanding athlete, having won the championship title in successive years. He had played for the University in both cricket and football and was still in the Second Eleven in cricket. Being on the Committee of the Athletic Association, he was very keen to promote sporting activities among the student body. Whenever we played tennis at the sports pavilion he was always there and somehow managed always to get into our foursome for mixed

doubles. Grace observed that he was interested in me, but I was determined not to get involved with a member of the teaching staff. Somehow, though, my prejudice was overcome – perhaps he was just persistent. It was not long before I fell deeply in love.

I was soon taken home to meet his family. Billy's parents, Mr and Mrs Henry Gittins, lived in Kowloon. He had five sisters and a brother. They were friendly and easy-going and accepted me into their circle without question. Billy's mother in particular showed a special liking for me, a liking which grew into a deep affection as the years went by. I had known the three younger sisters at school and had on occasion brought one of them home to the Peak where Mother had treated her with the usual courtesy she afforded our friends. I could not possibly have known that beneath her apparent friendliness there lurked the shadow of a bitter family feud which had not diminished in intensity in almost twenty years.

When Mother returned from England she showed her hostility in no uncertain manner. She refused to discuss the rights or wrongs of the feud but just demanded that I stop having anything further to do with Billy. Actually I had not even known about the incident until shortly before her return, when my eldest sister Victoria, who remembered it quite clearly, told me the story. It appeared that, seventeen or more years before, the Gittinses had occupied a house on the mid-levels which the owner suddenly wanted to repossess in order to let it to my mother's brother. A smaller house next door was offered in exchange and, although Mrs Gittins had not welcomed the idea, the move had been made. Unfortunately, only a few weeks after the move my maternal grandmother had suddenly died and shortly after that Mother's brother had failed in business. Less than a year later his wife had succumbed to a serious operation. The hardest blow of all seemed to be the fact that, although my aunt died, Mrs Gittins, who had the same operation at the same time, recovered. Vic told me that Mother, who was rather superstitious, had laid all the blame at the time on the Gittinses and the years had not lessened her bitterness, but my sister promised that she and her husband, who had some influence with Mother, would help smooth the way for me. Mother, however, having nursed her grief for so long, would not heed any reasoning whatsoever. She simply could not believe, she told me bitterly, that any child of hers could be so disloyal and lacking in consideration as to contemplate marrying into a family which had caused her so much sorrow. I felt the great-

est sympathy for her but saw no reason for her continued bitterness.

Although Father did not actually show his displeasure, I felt that he, too, was not entirely happy at the prospect. Billy had asked for an interview at which he explained that he hoped to marry me when I had completed my studies at the University and had formally requested Father's permission to court me. Father replied that he could make no promises in my mother's absence but he had given his consent for Billy to take me out. I should have known that he would have been against any daughter of his marrying into an Eurasian family which did not subscribe to his view and adopt Chinese nationality, because he felt that they would not be accepted into any community. I was not certain of this but decided that there was no point in arguing either with him or with Mother, so I quietly went on seeing Billy. By this time, he was no longer at the University but had joined his friend James Mackenzie Jack, who was manager of his family's firm of electrical engineers, William C. Jack and Company.

At the end of a most satisfactory second year at the University my parents dropped a bombshell. To my astonishment and utter dismay, they gave me the alternative of either discontinuing my association with Billy or giving up my course of study to be married. To do them justice, I am certain now that they did not for one moment think that I would take their ultimatum literally, but I was too young, too inexperienced and too rigid in nature to consider compromise. It was not an easy decision, but I gave up my course at the University and Billy and I were married the following March.

Father's new house, planned for many years, was at last ready for occupation although it was by no means completed. We moved in at the beginning of 1929 shortly before I was married. It had the same lovely view, though slightly angled, of bays and islands and the sea beyond. It was Mother's dream – a home large enough to hold the family under one roof, fitted with all the comforts that Father's means could afford, and lavishly yet tastefully furnished in appropriate Eastern and Western styles. By this time, however, the family had grown up: two of my elder sisters were married, the other two were overseas; both brothers had homes and families of their own; and now I, one of the younger group, was about to leave. In another four years both Grace and Florence had married.

Mother was left alone in a house too large for her and built too late to fulfil her desire of having the family under one roof. She became increasingly involved with the Buddhist religion and,

interested in promoting education for poor Chinese girls, established a free school for them in one of Hong Kong's less salubrious districts. Her selfless devotion to these interests culminated in the building of a magnificent temple-school complex during the last years of her life. We spent about two months of each summer with her. The children gave her immeasurable pleasure and I was able to help with the planning of her new garden which she wanted to extend in terraces down the hillside.

Ever since Elizabeth's birth when Mother stayed in the hospital to be with me, her views had undergone a change. She had seen more of Billy and his mother. Billy had a natural charm of manner which endeared him to elderly women and his mother certainly went out of her way to heal the breach. Mother's resentment gradually wore off and in its place a firm friendship and mutual respect grew between them. She found Billy's wide knowledge of engineering and construction work invaluable and leaned heavily on him for advice in her building project. Mother was a well-known, well-loved figure. When she died suddenly in 1938 many mourned her passing. The temple-school stands as a lasting monument to her deep devotion and her concern for the welfare of those less fortunate than herself.

Billy and I enjoyed ten completely happy years before the Second World War cast its shadow over us. Kowloon Tong was a new suburb designed especially for young families. We brought up our children in pleasant surroundings in an atmosphere as yet unspoiled and unpolluted. I spent a great deal of time in the garden, which we had to make from land reclaimed by developers. Billy was working on the electrification of the New Territories at that time and brought home each day a large bag of good soil to enrich the new flower and vegetable beds. I had the loan of a three-volume encyclopaedia of gardening which I studied assiduously and this, together with practical application gained from Mother's garden and our own (although gardeners did the actual work), endowed me with the knowledge and experience which were to prove so invaluable later on.

When John began attending junior school in 1939, I found time on my hands. I had no desire to spend my days at lunch or afternoon tea parties or at games of bridge or mah jong. I had attended a course of lectures on air-raid precautions and had sat and passed a three-hour paper with credit. It occurred to me that I could still study and, rather than return to the University to complete my Arts

course (which was probably what I should have done), I decided to take a secretarial course with a view to working at the University instead. By early 1940 I had joined its administrative staff as Secretary to the Dean of Medicine, Professor Gordon King. The Registrar had been happy to welcome me back as a staff member and I was soon thoroughly engrossed in the administration of medical students and, at the same time, taking part in the University's preparations for war.

It had been planned that in an emergency the University would immediately become the University Relief Hospital under the Medical Department to provide for a possible 750 beds. Professor Gordon King would be Medical Officer-in-Charge and Professor W. Faid, head of the Department of Physics, Lay Superintendent. I was to take over the hospital secretaryship. I was sent to the Queen Mary Hospital for training in hospital administration, with special attention to details of admission and discharge of patients so important to the function of a relief hospital.

At the evacuation order in 1940 Professor King's wife, Dr Mary King, left with their daughters for Melbourne. She offered to take our children with her, an offer which we accepted a year later. By this time the situation in Europe and China had so deteriorated that families returning from leave were not allowed to land unless they undertook to leave again after a brief visit. Billy was very anxious to get the children away, especially when it was pointed out to us that there would be no problem about their entry into Australia were they to travel on their own passports. This was because Gittins was an English name and they looked foreign enough. It was at this juncture that the Jack family, returning from England, were ordered to leave immediately for Australia. It was a heaven-sent opportunity for us to send Elizabeth and John with them to join the Kings in Melbourne.

---

<sup>1</sup>Davis, S.G., *Hong Kong in its Geographical Setting* (London, Collins, 1949).

## ***Chapter Two***

After the children's departure we moved to a small flat. Billy had been offered a commission but he elected to remain a Sergeant in 4th Battery. He was stationed at Lyemun, in charge of the search-lights guarding the entrance to Hong Kong harbour. They spent at least one night a week and alternate weekends training whilst in the University we, too, had frequent practices so that we could be mobilized at moment's notice.

Generally, though, life went on as usual. We all expected trouble, but the world could not stand still because of speculation. As Hong Kong's centenary year drew to a close, we looked forward to yet another season of goodwill and good cheer. There had been the usual round of pre-Christmas activities: charity balls, race meetings and cocktail parties, one do after another without a break. In Australia wives were clamouring to return. In spite of the evacuation of women and children, shops were filled with an even brighter display of Christmas goods, for the war in China had brought floods of refugees, many of them wealthy industrialists. Then on a beautiful morning in December our world was shattered: suddenly the war was on.

The Volunteers had been called up the day before, on Sunday, 7 December 1941. I had driven Billy to Headquarters and as I left him he made me promise to go on to the University to find out what I should do. He didn't relish the thought of my being alone in the flat. Little did I realize that I was never to hear his voice again – and the only sight of him would be from behind the barbed wires of a prison camp. One never knows what fate has in store but, as this was only the beginning of my troubles, it was perhaps as well that I remained in ignorance.

I went on to the University to see Professor Faid, who was also deputy censor. Bill Faid was Billy's close friend and I was to be billeted with him and his wife should the relief hospital come into being. He advised me to go home, put together a few things and

come to work on the following morning prepared to stay over for a day or two – just until the situation cleared. He told me that there had been rumours of Japanese activity but our intelligence had been across the border the day before and had been cordially received and entertained. Protestations of friendship had followed drinks of Japanese sake. The party had come away reassured.

I went home, put a few things in a suitcase and tidied my desk. It was well after midnight before I went to bed. The telephone rang shrilly at six o'clock the next morning, Monday, 8 December 1941. The voice of Professor Gordon King, Medical Officer-in-Charge of the University Relief Hospital, came through: he told me to report immediately, because we had to be ready to receive patients by noon. As I arrived at the University, Japanese bombs fell on Kai Tak airport.

The airport authorities were caught completely unawares. In a single disastrous raid our pitifully inadequate air defence was wiped out and our airfields rendered useless. Overall losses would have been heavier had not His Majesty's naval ships, with merchantmen in their wake, slipped away even before the Volunteers had been alerted. One small river gunboat, H.M.S. *Thracian*, was left in the harbour tied to a buoy in midstream. Our entire defence now rested with the garrison of four regiments – two British and two Indian – of regular troops, two battalions of raw Canadian youths newly arrived in Hong Kong, and our own stalwart Volunteers – this against eighty thousand Japanese troops poised to conduct a full-scale war.

Military strategists had long recognized that, in an emergency, the New Territories could never be held. The defence of the colony was therefore concentrated on Hong Kong Island. When hostilities broke out, three of our four regiments were placed in various strategic positions in the New Territories merely to fight a delaying action while the fourth, supported by the two Canadian battalions and the Hong Kong Volunteers, defended Hong Kong. We had always expected that any attack would come from the Japanese navy and the guns on all batteries pointed seawards – to defend entry into the harbour was considered essential. No one dreamt that the enemy would drive across the border to attack us with heavy fieldguns from behind the Kowloon hills.

After the bombing of the airport on 8 December, there followed eighteen days of resistance and heavy civilian casualties occurred due to shelling and bombing. The breakdown of communications,

widespread fifth-column infiltration and a shortage of food all contributed to making conditions distressing and utterly confused. Added to this was the desperate water situation: although our reservoirs were by no means empty, only a trickle came through the taps. The enemy, after gaining control of the reservoir area in the New Territories, had simply turned off our main source of water supply. In many respects, however, there was a remarkable degree of order, and morale was high. After delaying the Japanese advance, the regiments withdrew to Hong Kong Island, leaving police to fight a rearguard action. Even in the face of constant danger and extreme provocation there was remarkably little panic, although authentic news was scarce and rumour bred further wild rumour. Was there not a Chinese army on its way to relieve us? – we had only to hold out until it arrived. This was confirmed by our normally reliable press reports. Bulletin followed rousing bulletin.

On the strength of their success on the mainland, the Japanese commander sent a Peace Mission on 13 December: capitulate – or else. There was naturally no question of surrender, and both shelling and bombing were intensified. The University, which had set up emergency wards in the Great Hall and the Gymnasium, was hit by a misdirected shell and, although damage was slight, it was decided to move the wards up to the student hostels.

We were already working under heavy pressure because, although medical and nursing personnel had reported for duty, hospital orderlies, stretcher bearers and domestic staff failed to turn up – due to fifth column influence? Fortunately we were able to enlist the help of the student body, but moving the wards to the hostels made the daily transfer of patients from the government hospitals much more difficult. Because of the constant shelling during daylight hours, transfers had to be made at night and approach to the hostels was up narrow winding paths which ambulances could not negotiate. Were it not for the students we could not have managed.

The increased shelling of our positions was a prelude to preparations for an enemy landing. An attempt on the night of 15 December was foiled by the combined efforts of the guns and searchlights of 4th Battery, whose action was commended. The Battery came in for heavy punishment, and with the consequent silencing of its guns a message came through that 4th Battery had been evacuated, but, when by nightfall I could see the searchlights playing across the



harbour, I knew that although the gun crew had been withdrawn Billy was still at his post.

The night of 18/19 December was dark with heavy clouds, and burning oil tanks at North Point had covered that part of Hong Kong Island with a pall of black smoke. Taking advantage of darkness, the enemy landed on several points, and in the early hours of 19 December some of the worse atrocities of the war were committed. The stories that came to us, obviously garbled but none the less disturbing, insisted that Billy was among those killed. Trying to cope with hospital emergencies occupied my mind during the day but the agony of doubt, tension and fear kept me awake at night.

A week of intense and bitter fighting followed the landing. Our troops, facing hopeless odds, suffered heavily but, as they yielded inch by inch, they inflicted severe damage. Even when Japanese soldiers marched on city streets we were still urged to hold fast and fight on: whatever the odds, whatever the sacrifice, each day of action in Hong Kong was of vital importance to the Allied cause. When resistance was finally crushed and the white flag flew over Government House on Christmas Day, we could not believe it true. Disillusion and dismay were to come later. Surrender left us stunned.

The lull which followed the fighting was more unsettling. We had expected war, had prepared for it and had performed creditably while it lasted. We had seen isolation as an inevitable circumstance of a long-term blockade and our godowns were well-stocked with food and other supplies, but the possibility of defeat had been recognized only by the realists. The humiliation of surrender and the frustration and inactivity of the aftermath were conditions to which we had yet to become adjusted.

We were now a Japanese colony – our fall was so different to Britain's peaceful occupation exactly one hundred years before. Our acceptance of the situation was made no easier by the sight of Japanese army officers strutting before us trailing their long swords. Under a thin veneer of Western civility their instincts were bestial and savage. The stories of their brutality, of rape and looting committed by their men, however exaggerated, could not be ignored. The city itself remained hushed and deserted but elsewhere, with no police force to uphold law and order, looting by the rabble became general. No one knew what to expect or, indeed, what to do.

Our troops were instructed to surrender arms and ammunition



Triumphal entry of victorious Japanese Army into Hong Kong.  
(*Hong Kong News*)

and to give themselves up. By New Year's Day 1942, they had been assembled in a large refugee camp at North Point which civilians were allowed to visit. At its gates many learnt for the first time of the loss of a loved one during the fighting, but many of the details were mere hearsay. Bill Faid saved me this harrowing experience. He came back with the news that Billy was indeed missing, believed killed when the enemy landed, but no one was able to confirm this so there was still hope. The authorities were not entirely to blame. One of their greatest difficulties had been the lack of information and co-ordination, because of the rapid deterioration of the situation. All too soon even this briefest of contacts was denied to us. Our men were sent over to the permanent military camps in Kowloon.

My sister Eva, a doctor, was assistant to Dr Robert Lim of the Chinese Red Cross when war broke out. She had returned for Father's birthday celebration and had been caught in Hong Kong because of the difficulty of getting back to China. She had volunteered for service with the University Relief Hospital and, even though they were aware of her unbending personality, Gordon King welcomed her assistance, and Bill and Jeanne Faid pressed her

to join me as their guest – an invitation Eva readily accepted because she had no desire to return to ‘that menagerie’ (Father’s townhouse).

Late one afternoon I found Eva closely examining her jacket by the light of the window. When I asked her what on earth she was looking for, she calmly replied, ‘Lice.’ Eva went on to explain that, because of the conflicting stories, she had wished to see for herself if Billy were indeed alive. As the ferries were not yet running, she had crossed over to Kowloon on a small fishing boat. During the crossing, she had seen lice crawl up the collar of a fellow passenger close to her and she was making sure now that none had reached her. She assured me, though, that Billy, a POW in Shamshuipo Camp, was alive and well – she never got close enough to speak to him, but they had waved to each other.

The trouble Eva had taken to be able to reassure me was quite in keeping with the kind and impulsive nature she usually tried to hide. This was the first definite news I had that Billy had survived the shelling of Lyemun Fort.

## ***Chapter Three***

On 4 January 1942 copies of a curt notice were widely displayed. It was an order for all British, American and Dutch nationals to report at 9.30 the next morning to the large military parade ground in the city. No indication was given of what was to happen, but people were instructed to carry with them such essentials as would be needed for overnight use.

Many, especially those who lived in Kowloon, had been made homeless and did not possess much in any case. At the outbreak of war, they had reported cheerfully to their various postings or, as families of the HKVDC or essential service personnel, had moved into billets requisitioned for this purpose. However, either because of damage done to buildings by bomb and shell or in order to make way for our troops falling back on the Island, they were shifted from billet to billet. Some had crossed over because they decided they would be safer on the Island, but when the water supply was cut off and electricity failed they were unable to return to their Kowloon homes because the ferries stopped operating. No one would have thought that they would never see their homes again – or, if they did, they would find their possessions looted and Japanese soldiers in occupation. The situation was frightening and most alarming of all was the ever-growing problem of food shortage. Although there was an abundance of supplies in government stores these had been taken over by the enemy. Money was short because banks had closed their doors. To many, therefore, the prospect of internment offered a hope of survival – at the very least they would be housed and fed.

The Japanese authorities were faced with a dilemma: they could not allow non-Chinese people to go about freely in a colony which was now theirs and disregard the fact that a New Order had been established in East Asia. On the other hand, where could they go? It was rumoured that consideration was given to exterminating them. Such action would certainly have been quickest, but a better

solution was found: enemy aliens would be interned and their maintenance charged to their respective governments. Meanwhile, they had to be isolated. To this effect half a dozen cheap hotels on the waterfront were requisitioned. These were part brothel and part boarding-house in the poorest section of the town which in normal times catered for impoverished seamen. The accommodation offered was filthy and verminous, kitchen and sanitation facilities were deplorable – there was no water even for toilets – and hardly any natural light ever penetrated dirty windows set high up at each end of long narrow corridors. Electricity had not been restored so there was no lighting. Nor did the lifts work. Whether by miscalculation of the space required or of the number of people to be accommodated, those who obeyed the summons to report to the parade ground – some 1,500 men, women, children and babies – were now forced to endure the worst fortnight of their ordeal so far.

As they were marched to their destination, the foreigners presented a pitiful sight to the quietly sympathetic spectators who lined the city streets. It was not a long march and soon they left the December sunshine to enter their new billets. The gloom of their surroundings foreshadowed the darkness that lay ahead. They felt their stumbling way along dim passages and up rickety flights of stairs. Four people to a tiny cubicle. Four bodies to rest crosswise on one single bed. Selection was made strictly in order of entry, with a grunt and a shove with the butt-end of a rifle to help them on. No consideration was given to elderly people, nor were the sexes segregated. No thought was spared for their feeding, and forty-eight hours elapsed before they were issued with a handful of uncooked rice. The few who managed to slip out smuggled in absolute essentials. This and the courage and unbounding loyalty of Chinese friends and former servants who risked their own safety saved many from further terrible deprivations. In these hovels they existed for sixteen days.

Relief came when it was least expected: suddenly it was announced that they were to be transferred to Stanley.

The news was hailed with excitement and enthusiasm. Their troubles had come to an end, for all knew Stanley to be a lovely beach resort even though it had been partially spoilt in 1937 by the erection of a large modern prison. Stanley peninsula, jutting into the sea from the south and more beautiful side of Hong Kong Island, lies between the waters of Stanley Bay to the west and Tytam Bay in the



Aerial view of Stanley Peninsula showing Stanley Prison in the foreground and the buildings which housed internees in the centre. The Peninsula is flanked by Stanley Bay (left) and Tytam Bay (right). Stanley Village and beach houses spread along the coastline at the northern end of the isthmus. Victoria Peak, Mount Cameron and nearby hills form a natural background.

(Courtesy of Hong Kong Government Information Services)

east. Tiny Tweed Bay lies on its southeastern tip. The peninsula, joined to Hong Kong by a short isthmus, reaches out to the South China Sea. Unlike the cities of Victoria and Kowloon, the intervening years have seen comparatively little change on the face of this quiet haven. A little fishing village still nestles along the edge of Stanley Bay. A police station guards its entrance. Stanley peninsula rises slightly towards the grounds and buildings of the Anglican St Stephen's College, which had been used as a casualty hospital during the fighting.

Beyond the College property and occupying the centre of the peninsula still stand two pleasant-looking bungalows and a cluster of modern flats. They provided, and still do, accommodation for officers of Stanley Prison and had been built to overlook the prison compound. On the other side of the main road leading to the gates

of the prison, in a sheltered hollow down by the beach, lie another seven less attractive-looking blocks of flats of red brick. These blocks later came to be known in the camp as the Indian Quarters, because the rank and file warders who lived there were of Indian nationality. Before the Second World War, Indians were employed extensively as policemen, guards and gaolers.

Beyond the prison, Bluff Head towers steeply above like a sentinel. On its summit barracks and a fort had been built. Between High Bluff and the school buildings a quiet little cemetery had lain undisturbed the best part of a hundred years. The earliest British garrison had been stationed at Stanley and many who had died of malaria or typhoid fever, or as the result of poisoning by the villagers (so the story goes), had been buried there. The place was ideally suited for the internment of enemy aliens but, because it had also been a battlefield, an advance party was sent out to clear and clean it up.

During the fighting in December there had been a gallant last stand on Stanley peninsula. Word of the surrender had not reached the troops in this area and, after all else was sad and silent, the guns of Stanley fort could still be heard. Here, too, was the scene of a most shocking atrocity. A band of drunken Japanese soldiers had invaded the war-time St Stephen's Casualty Hospital (housed in the main building of the College) on Christmas Day. They shot the medical officers who tried to stop their entrance to the wards; they outraged and murdered three young English nurses; others they shot, bayoneted or raped – they even bayoneted patients in their beds.

When fighting ceased, the hospital dead had been carried out on their mattresses and burnt in the grounds of the College. In shallow graves by the hillside, near where they had fallen, troop casualties had been hastily buried by their comrades, their corpses to be uncovered later by hungry dogs. In a mass grave in the cemetery, the remains of the doctors and nurses were now reverently laid to rest. An appalling task still faced the advance party which was sent out to prepare the camp for occupation. They did what they could in as short a time as possible but, without proper equipment or cleaning materials, there was little they could do about obliterating the blood stains on the walls, the stairs and the grounds of the College. Throughout the years of our internment these bore indelible testimony to their violent story.



Victims of the hospital massacre on Christmas Day 1941.



The despairing people in the hotels waited with impatience, although the very thought of impending release gave them fresh hope. Meanwhile, two sections of the community were spared this particular outrage. Possibly because of the overcrowding in the hotels, as well as the fact that the areas were relatively isolated, residents of the Peak district, on representations from the Chief Justice, were permitted to remain in their homes temporarily. At the University, the Vice-Chancellor had made himself responsible for all the staff. We were virtually interned within the compound and were honour bound not to attempt escape. This did not mean that such action was not contemplated by the more venturesome. We all knew, though, that it could only be a short reprieve.

Of the general population, Chinese and Indians were not to be interned, nor were the sprinkling of Germans who were now Allies of Japan. The Eurasian community and the Russians, Norwegians and others, although free, were required to carry 'third national' identification passes. They were constantly stopped in the streets to have their passes examined.

The enforced inactivity gave us a respite. The University hospital was now quieter because, as patients were discharged, no fresh intake had occurred. We expected to go into Stanley in due course. Meanwhile, some gave thought to working out essentials they would have to take with them. Others were concerned with packing and storing their possessions although, having witnessed some of the looting across the road from the University since the Japanese occupation, no one really expected to see anything again.

I had problems of a different nature. When communication with Kowloon was restored, confirmation came that Billy was alive and well. Our home was of course in Kowloon, but my movements were confined to within the University campus and, from reports that reached us about the looting in Kowloon, I knew that there was little hope of finding it intact – if anything at all would be there – so there was little point in worrying about it. My problems arose from my dual nationality.

The Japanese already had their hands full with prisoners of war and civilian enemy aliens and had no wish to intern anyone else. Besides, with enemy aliens out of the way, they could concentrate on an all-out effort towards promoting goodwill amongst the Indians and the Chinese with the allurements of the Japanese-sponsored Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity scheme. Were I then to claim

Chinese nationality, I could return to the family home and remain free. However, Billy was a prisoner in a British POW Camp; our children were enjoying the hospitality of Australia. Could I on moral grounds now use my Chinese nationality merely to escape internment? I was told that an American woman had done so, claiming that she was the fourth concubine of a wealthy Chinese businessman in Shanghai, and the Japanese had allowed her her freedom. I was in a real dilemma and wished I could talk things over with Billy.

Several days before the University contingent received orders to move into Stanley Camp, a member of our Chinese medical staff was appointed to take over the hospital. He asked me if I would stay behind to assist him. I jumped at the opportunity it offered for a further respite, hoping to find some way of seeing Billy. I agreed to do so for a limited time on the condition that he would get me an 'enemy alien' pass which would give me freedom of movement around the town. This was a valuable document – as events later proved – because Japanese sentries jumped to the conclusion after examining my pass that I was someone of importance and had been permitted to stay out of internment on official business. The Vice-Chancellor, who felt responsible for me, agreed to my staying provided that two students would be permitted to move in with me. They were Sergei Hohlov, a Russian, and his friend Victor Zaitzev.

I had noticed the two lads who had volunteered to work in the hospital, especially the blond and sturdy-looking Hohlov. They were White Russians from Harbin in Manchuria sent to Hong Kong by their parents to further their studies. They were selected to look after me not on their personal qualities alone but, because Manchuria had been occupied by Japan since the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-5, the students had experience of living under Japanese rule.

My friends, with their meagre possessions, were taken away in open lorries on 30 January 1942 for Stanley Camp. I stayed on in the Faids' home and the students moved in with me. Two others in the University had been issued with permits similar to mine – the former Medical Officer-in-Charge, Professor Gordon King, who lived in his own house on the grounds, and the Chief Government Pharmacist, Arthur Bentley, who joined us at the end of hostilities.

All bank accounts had been frozen since the occupation. An announcement appeared in the press towards the end of January that Chinese nationals would be allowed to use theirs. Only five banks were named and a limited withdrawal of HK\$100 was imposed.

Here was an opportunity to test my acceptance as a Chinese. When the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank was also named a little later, I immediately presented a cash cheque to the teller. He looked at my signature and then at me – in name and appearance I was a foreigner. I would have to see the manager, he said. The manager was sympathetic but said he could not accept the responsibility and suggested that I see the Japanese Controller of Finance. I did not have anything with me that would identify me as my father's daughter but after listening to me briefly he accepted my word and soon I was armed with a written permit to draw from my account.

One hundred dollars in Hong Kong currency<sup>1</sup> even at that time was a mere pittance for anyone without means of support, but it gave me tremendous satisfaction to gain what I considered to be a moral victory over the enemy. Moreover, should I decide to stay out of internment, my right to freedom was established. I might add that before I went into Stanley I left a number of signed cheques with the Russians. They managed to clear my account gradually, using the proceeds to send food parcels to Billy and to me.

The effort of getting to Shamshuipo Camp to see Billy was made more arduous by a lack of road transport. What with walking from University to ferry and from ferry to camp, and then the journey in reverse, we (that is, the two students and I) must have covered many miles on each visit. All this and more would have been well worth the trouble had I succeeded in having a talk with Billy but, other than sighting him at a distance, all attempts at communication failed.

We made three trips, spending the night before the last occasion at my sister's home in Kowloon so that we could be there early, the students having received a message from their friends in camp which said that a friendly guard would be on duty at dawn.

We reached the appointed spot at 5.30 in the morning. Billy and others were behind the barbed wire fence, staring into the semi-darkness, waiting. A small group of relatives who had obviously been given a similar message were standing on the other side of the wide road. Some of the girls sobbed quietly – the guards, they told us, had been anything but friendly, having shouted abuse at them and threatened to shoot if they moved any closer to the camp. In the murky light of early morning we were barely able to recognize the prisoners who were dressed alike in khaki. Billy waved his forage cap incessantly. It was bitterly cold.

We decided to follow the perimeter fence towards the main entrance, hoping to meet a more amiable guard. The prisoners moved inside in the same direction without getting any closer to us. As the minutes ticked by and the outline of the main gate rose in the distance, it began to dawn on me that our mission was about to fail. As we neared the entrance, I asked the students to stay in the background while I went on to the little police station manned by a few guards not far from the gate. With a mixture of pidgin English, Chinese and signs, I begged to be allowed to speak to my husband. Whether these guards knew that I would be stopped by the sentries at the gate, or whether they were possessed of a more humanitarian outlook, I will never know but, after a short discussion among themselves, their spokesman indicated that I could proceed.

Boldly I walked towards Billy. With only a few yards between us I heard a loud commotion from behind. The guards were shouting frantically and waving their arms for me to stop: a carload of *Kempeitai* (Japanese military police) had chosen that very moment to pay a surprise visit to the camp. I fled.

The incident left me badly shaken and as soon as I rejoined the students we left for home. We made our weary way in silence, lost in our own thoughts. Each visit, begun in such high hope, had in fact been nothing but a harrowing experience for, besides the frustration of fruitless endeavour, the sight of the prisoners, resembling wild animals in captivity, filled me with despair. Furthermore, I began to realize all too clearly that the danger of our being shot at was very real while, from the prisoners' angle, our visits could be made a reason for reprisals in the camp.

When Stanley Camp was first occupied there was a certain degree of coming and going, that is, entry was possible if anyone with a pass cared to risk being detained. I had promised the Faids to visit them. Moreover, I was anxious to see for myself what it was like. An Austrian student had made the trip in the Medical Department van which called each morning at the University hospital with supplies before going to the camp. I determined to do the same and, as the van was scheduled to stop for only a few minutes, I planned to stay overnight.

Bill Faid had promised to look out for me and, sure enough, he was waiting by the camp hospital when I arrived. He took me immediately to see Jeanne in their new home, a tiny, hovel-like room in a two-room flat in the Indian warders' quarters – a flat

which they shared with four or five others. That night he slept on the cold stone floor while I had his bed. Their miserable ration was shared between three. On the second visit I was forced to stay an extra night because the van did not turn up, but I was given a lift into town on the following day by the Director of Medical Services, who had arrived on a routine visit.

I found that the stories we heard of conditions in Stanley Camp were by no means exaggerated – if anything, conditions were a good deal worse. The accommodation was hopelessly inadequate: thirty-five people packed into a standard sized flat and over fifty in a small family bungalow. (The flats in the Indian warders' quarters were much smaller and housed an average of seven people.) The internees looked starved, despairing and utterly forlorn although there were some who kept their spirit. Many dressed carelessly, their movements were listless and swollen ankles, an early sign of beriberi, were already in evidence. They hungered for news of the war – some still thought that the Chinese army was on the way. Had I plans for escape? Was the Red Cross doing anything about our repatriation? I was besieged with questions and with requests to bring food, especially sugar – requests which by their sheer number I most reluctantly had to refuse.

Transport had suddenly become a problem. The Medical Department van no longer called at the University and every car in the compound had disappeared from the parking lot one night – they had been taken by the authorities for shipment as scrap metal to Japan. I well remember the morning, soon after the capitulation, when this happened and the consternation the discovery had caused. Bentley's Baby Austin was the only car left: he had managed to run it into the pathway leading to the hostels and it hadn't been noticed. There were few cars on the road – only those used by Japanese officials and the few citizens who had registered which carried large new number plates. Bentley's petrol tank was full but his car would have been conspicuous without the new numbers. I asked him for the loan of it for just one more visit into Stanley and he was kind enough to oblige.

It was quite a memorable trip. The two Russians came with me. We each carried a small case with a few gifts, packing our main supplies under the car seats – cars were not designed with boots in those days. From previous experience with the bread van I knew that we would be obliged to pass half a dozen sentries on the way. I

knew the drill: you stopped the car, stepped out, bowed respectfully to the sentry and showed your pass. Most would be satisfied with a cursory glance at the car and you could be on your way. On this occasion one of the sentries took exception to Zaitzev's rigid manner of bowing and slapped him hard on the face. During our years of internment we were to learn that face-slapping was the most favoured form of asserting authority or dispensing punishment, a characteristic reaction of Japanese sentries and officers alike. Time and time again we were to witness its liberal application, not only to internees at the slightest provocation, but to their own juniors as well. In Zaitzev's case I am certain it was his innate distaste for the slightest indication of subservience which made him bow as he did. I suppose we were fortunate to have been let off so lightly. In Japanese eyes, disrespect to a sentry is tantamount to an insult to the Emperor.

At the gates to Stanley Camp, the Russians, being third nationals, were not allowed entry. Permission for me to proceed confirmed the importance I had attached to the enemy alien pass: they thought that I was someone important on an official visit.

I left as soon as I had dropped my supplies. I was anxious about the students but they were sitting patiently by the police station. We returned to the University without incident. Thinking over the events of the day, I realized that the risk I had undertaken had been considerable and totally unjustified. I had achieved little. Using Bentley's car without Japanese license plates was asking too much of Providence. Sooner or later my luck would have to run out.

I had seen nothing of the family during these weeks, although there had been the occasional call on the telephone. Father was away: shortly before the war he had gone over, as he often did when he needed a rest, to his house in Macau. We all agreed that he was well out of the trouble in Hong Kong especially as Macau was a Portuguese colony and Portugal was not at war with Japan. He was getting on for eighty years of age and considered himself semi-retired when it suited him, although he still retained a wide interest in finance and property and personally conducted his affairs.

Besides his house on the Peak, which had been requisitioned by the army during hostilities to station a mule corps and was extensively damaged, and the one in Macau, he had a large townhouse not far from the University where some of the family were assembled and to which I could have gone. Furthermore, two of my sisters, Vic

and Grace, were married to the Lo brothers, M.K. and Horace, and lived close by. They now pressed me to make my home with them, although they were themselves under extreme stress. M.K. Lo, a solicitor, had been a prominent member of the former British government and immediately after our capitulation he had been seized by the Japanese and kept in solitary confinement until he agreed to join the new government. He had no choice and from then on he and his family were placed under strict surveillance. I recognized only too well that my association with the various camps – and I could not have kept away – would only add to their embarrassment and yet, if I did not join them, with the cost of even the barest necessities rising each day, I had no idea how I was going to live. I was unwilling to seek employment, as so many were doing, with the Japanese.

Nor could I go home. Our flat was still standing, but all our possessions, except the two large wardrobes and refrigerator, had disappeared. On one of our visits to Shamshuipo Camp the students and I had called in. Japanese officers were in occupation. They were quite civil. When I saw the flat stripped of furniture and asked what had happened, their spokesman replied that he didn't know.

I paused in front of my wardrobe and indicated that I wanted to look inside. The door was opened to reveal Japanese army coats hanging on the rail. Steel helmets tumbled out. Not trusting myself to speak, I turned to go. I realized the futility of claiming anything: a wardrobe was not something I could tuck into my pocket. Tears dimmed my eyes as I walked away.

There was no question of joining the Gittinses either. The family had suffered heavy loss. Fortunately, Billy's younger brother, S.V. Gittins (later a Queen's Counsel), was in the Intelligence Service and had been transferred to Singapore and then to China, but three of the girls' husbands had served with the Volunteers. Two of the three had been killed in action. The third, whose wife, Mabel, I had seen in Stanley, was interned in Shamshuipo. A fourth son-in-law, Frank Fisher, who normally lived in one of the coastal ports and had been caught in Hong Kong, was, I was to learn later, also in Stanley. Mr and Mrs Gittins, with their two widowed daughters, were billeted in a flat on the Mid-levels. Like so many others who lived in Kowloon, their homes had been looted.

The uncertainty of my outlook, the loss of my home, and the heartbreak over my visits to Shamshuipo Camp strongly influenced

my inclination to join Mabel in Stanley. Added to these influences was the possibility constantly in our minds that there would surely be an exchange of prisoners of war. If this happened and I was in Stanley I would be eligible for exchange which would take me to Australia and the children. Nevertheless, I did not make the decision lightly. There was no doubt that conditions in Stanley were deplorable. At the same time, I felt that mere physical discomfort and even possible starvation would be a small price to pay to join the children, especially now that Billy and I were separated. I was not to know that internment would be for the duration of war, nor could I foresee the effects of starvation – nutritional disease in some form or other was to be the lot of almost every internee. Even so, were I to face the problem again I am certain that I would not have acted otherwise. With the knowledge of hindsight, especially of what the people in Hong Kong were forced to endure, I realize now I made the right decision.

When I took up my duties as Secretary of the University Relief Hospital I became automatically a member of the Auxiliary Nursing Service under the Director of Medical Services, Dr P.S. Selwyn-Clarke. Dr Selwyn-Clarke had not been long in Hong Kong before he was recognized as an able and dedicated administrator. Under an exterior of benevolent courtesy, he concealed a character which was forceful, inflexible and autocratic. He was reputed to be quite ruthless in matters of discipline within his own Department, and he made no secret of the fact that he was determined to stamp out all suggestion of corruption or graft. Outside his work Selwyn (as he was known to his friends) was gracious and charming. The whole family knew him and we liked him very much.

Even as I set my heart on Stanley I knew that Selwyn would oppose it. I had hinted at the possibility a couple of times and each time he had tried to dissuade me, telling me that I could be of far greater service to my friends by remaining outside. I realized that I would have to bide my time, as were others. Neither Gordon King nor Bentley had any intention of remaining in occupied Hong Kong and Gordon King's escape in mid-February gave me an opportunity to tackle Selwyn. Gordon said he had an excellent chance. All he needed was a start of forty-eight hours before the alarm was raised. I was anxious for him to get away. Besides my personal association with him, his wife had the care of our children in Australia. I allowed three days to elapse before I told the students. They were



aghast at my unconcern and alarmed for my safety, and they begged me to report the matter immediately. Hohlov explained that they knew Japanese methods and that it would be very much worse if I left it for them to find out about Professor King.

I saw Selwyn the next morning to ask for my transfer into Stanley. Selwyn did not approve because of the effect it would have on my health, and urged me to join him at the French hospital if I felt unsafe at the University.

I had been unwilling to drag Gordon King into this conversation because I knew that Selwyn would regard his escape as breaking parole, but I had no alternative. Selwyn thumped his desk and asked me why I had not reported it immediately – then made one of his sudden decisions: my only safety lay in Stanley Camp. He would call for me the next morning and take me in himself.

Having left home with a single suitcase, I only had a few belongings. I realized, though, the need for certain essentials. On one of my trips to Shamshuipo Camp I had paid one precious dollar for a dirty second-hand folding campbed from a man on a side-street. I had given it a good scrubbing. Before going to bed, I packed my suitcase and placed it in readiness in the hall together with the campbed, an electric hotplate from the Faids' kitchen, a portable typewriter and some paper from the office supply.

The night seemed endless. Once again I looked at the clock: it was barely 6 a.m. and all I had to do was to strip my bed of sheets and blankets to take along with me – there was time for a hot bath.

A knock at my bedroom door jolted me back to reality. It was Arthur Bentley – he had brought me some porridge which he said he would leave by the door. 'Don't let it get cold, will you? It's the last you'll see for a long time.'

Bentley was not a demonstrative person, but this was thoughtful of him and most generous – food was scarce and porridge a rare treat.

I had lost a lot of weight since the hostilities began and my slacks and jacket hung loosely on me. The DMS had no difficulty in making a case for my admission into Tweed Bay Hospital in the camp. He admonished me to take no risks and pushed a large jar of malt and cod liver oil at me when he said goodbye.

And so I entered a three-and-a-half-year term of voluntary internment. In the days that followed I sometimes wondered if I had acted wisely: not only was I worried about the effect on my health,

but doubts as to whether Billy would approve of my action crept in to haunt long sleepless nights. These doubts grew more frequent as the years rolled by and hopes of joining the children steadily dimmed, but I cannot remember a single occasion when I experienced real regret.

---

<sup>1</sup>approximately Austral. \$15.

## ***Chapter Four***

Tweed Bay Hospital, a three-storey building of red brick, was pleasantly situated facing the sea. The top storey consisted of a large dormitory for fifty nurses. Four wards occupied the intermediate level and on the ground floor there were three more wards as well as offices, an operating theatre, kitchen and dispensary. Like the Indian Quarters, it had stone floors, ill-fitting metal framed windows and native latrines – that is, water closets fitted below floor-level over which one squatted.

The hospital was in the charge of Dr K. Uttley, a senior government medical officer. The medical and surgical staffs were government officers, University professors or doctors in private practice who had volunteered their services; nursing sisters came from government hospitals. Volunteers did all the chores and laundry. I was placed in a ward with about a dozen mothers with babies and one elderly unattached woman. We managed well enough, but I should have preferred not to have been placed with the mothers, especially when their babies cried from hunger or discomfort. Still, I was thankful that I was free to come and go until curfew each day. There were many grumbles about the food – or the lack of it – but, as I had expected the worst, I didn't think it too bad.

It had been a long day and I was ready for bed. I washed myself in a borrowed bowl and cleaned my face under the tap in the toilet room. I do not use cosmetics except lipstick but, from the open wicker basket which contained my few possessions, I found a jar of rather expensive skin-cream missing. Its loss was one of those disagreeable things that all internees had to learn to accept, but it taught me to take greater care of what was left.

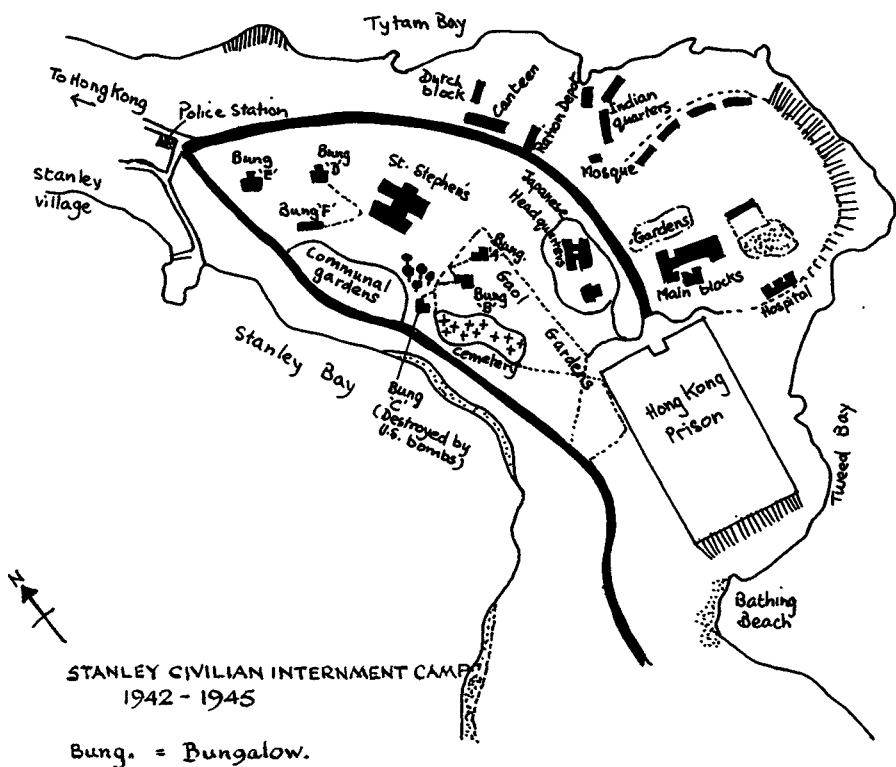
The relative comforts of Tweed Bay Hospital notwithstanding, I sought escape from the mothers and babies as often as I could, returning only for meals and at curfew. However, the cold February winds and frequent heavy drizzle did not encourage open-air activity; furthermore, the entire camp area, enclosed in a barbed

wire fence, was roughly only half a square mile. It took a maximum of seven minutes' brisk walk to cross from any one point.

Whenever I return to Hong Kong I never fail to revisit Stanley – something seems to draw me there – perhaps to commune with some of those who did not come through the ordeal of internment. My visit in November 1969 coincided with Remembrance Sunday. After the memorial service, we spent a few minutes in the cemetery, which is now being cared for by the military authorities – the grave-stones of the defence forces were erected postwar. The atmosphere on that bright November morning was clear and crisp but restful. Walking through to the grounds of St Stephen's College, I noticed a new chapel. Otherwise nothing seemed to have changed.

The buildings set aside for internees consisted of two main groups: those associated with Stanley Prison and others belonging to St Stephen's College. East of the prison near the hospital was a cluster of modern flats. First, there were the four large blocks built around a rectangular courtyard, which were known as the 'Married Quarters' because in normal times they housed the British prison officers and their families. Three smaller blocks, for single officers, stood at the northeast corner of the large blocks, beside a playground and tennis courts which were later to be turned into a vegetable garden. About three hundred Americans occupied the largest of the three blocks and, as they had plenty of money, they were given preferential treatment by the Japanese. The blocks were numbered 1 to 7, but as a group they were more commonly referred to as the 'Main Blocks'.

The Married Quarters were shockingly over-crowded. The first internees to arrive from the hotels in town rushed to take possession, assuming that as they were divided into flats they would be better furnished than the College rooms. Thus each family occupied a whole flat: the father the dining room, the mother the sitting room, and the children the bedrooms. However, when the Japanese authorities arrived and said that thirty-five persons were assigned to each flat, the real situation dawned on the first occupants. There was nothing they could do about it as there was no other accommodation available. They soon discovered that throughout the camp living conditions were bad and to change billets was almost as difficult as trying to escape. Even when people managed to make a change it often turned out to be for the worse. Many lifelong friendships broke up under the strain.



I knew that Billy's sister Mabel and her children were in this part of the camp. On a cold and wintry morning, just after ten o'clock, I found Mabel's elder son in the courtyard. Nine-year-old Michael was a sensible lad and a great help to his mother, to whom he was carefully carrying a covered saucepan of hot water just rationed out. I followed him to their quarters.

We entered an average sized dining room of a standard two-bedroom flat. Besides Mabel and her three children, it had also to accommodate two other women and a nine-year-old child. This was to be their home for three and a half years. A window gave access to a small balcony overlooking the playground and hospital roof. Three people I did not know sat talking on a camp stretcher.

Mabel looked pale and anxious; she was bent over the one bed in the room, coaxing a very sick Peter into swallowing a few spoonfuls

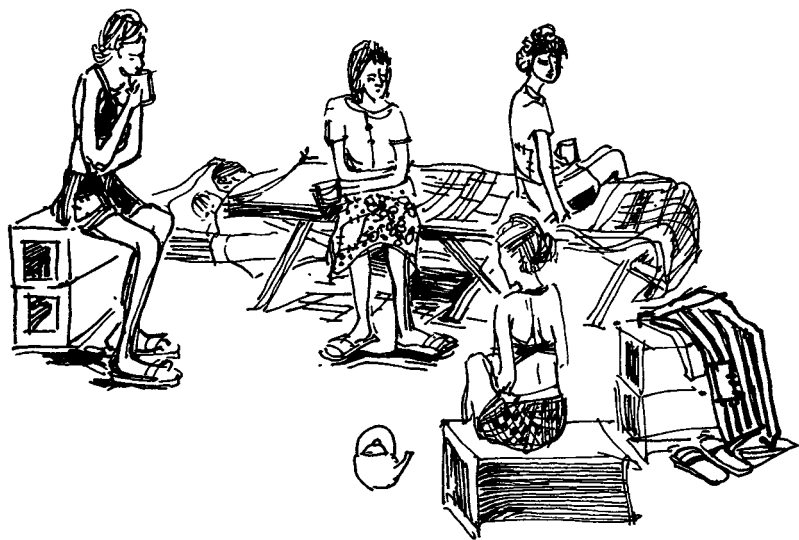
of *congee* (a rice broth), which had been dished out at the courtyard kitchen earlier. Sheila, the youngest, was curled up at the foot of the bed reading a book.

I felt the sick child's forehead. It was hot and dry. 'He's running a temperature, Mabel.'

'I know. He'll feel better when the fever goes down. I'll take him to the clinic this afternoon. Let's have a cup of tea. I feel desperately cold.' Thanking Michael, she suggested that he might take Sheila out for a breath of air.

Michael left the room obediently, taking his sister with him. The three strangers tactfully withdrew. Tea, a precious commodity in the camp, was made in a small jug with water long past the boil and we sat on the solitary bed in the room drinking the pale amber liquid out of tin mugs.

Mabel told me how they were managing on one bed in a small room shared with three strangers. Mercifully, the days did not drag – there were so many queues to attend. The children were out for most of the time, and a school was being organized and was to begin the following week. Her greatest anxiety was over the children: they were frequently unwell with colds and diarrhoea and when they were not sick they were hungry all the time. The nights were terribly cold, she said, and no matter how they huddled together, they



simply could not get warm. The two younger children shared the bed, and she and Michael slept on the floor. Queuing for meals and hot water took hours and, more often than not, the supply ran out before their turn came to be served.

‘There’s only one bathroom in the flat,’ she continued. ‘It has to serve thirty-five people, so you can imagine the queues at the door.’

Another queue stood by the sink to wash the few eating utensils after a meal. Fortunately, the dishes were never greasy because there was only cold water from the taps. Denying herself, although she would not admit it, to give her children a little extra food, she tried to keep them occupied and in good health. She had been doing this for over a month, hoping each day would bring some improvement.

‘But I don’t regret having come into the camp instead of staying out with the others,’ she said, ‘although I can’t say how thankful I am to have you near. Stay as long as you can in the hospital, Jean. At least they give you your proper ration there. You’ve no idea of the thieving that goes on in the kitchens. Surely they can’t keep us like this for much longer?’

It was distressing to see Mabel. She was thin and drawn and there was nothing I could really say to comfort or reassure her. She looked really ill – she, too, was a victim of malaria.

Mabel soon made light of her troubles as she always did. Throughout the years we spent in Stanley, years in which conditions improved only slightly from the early disorganized days, Mabel never lost her cheerfulness for long, nor did her ability to look beyond her immediate worries desert her. No matter how tough things became, her selfless generosity never wavered. She eventually retrieved her jewellery from town and sold it now and then to buy extras. Her engagement ring fetched something like 30,000 military yen or HK\$120,000<sup>1</sup>. Whenever she sold something, she would rush down to see me in the Indian Quarters so that I, too, could share in the extras that she had. We were far closer than mere relatives.

I found a friend, Una Brown, whose husband, Sergeant Harold Brown of the Hong Kong Volunteers, had been killed in the fighting. Una lived in a tiny servant’s cubicle on the ground floor of one of the main blocks with her infant daughter and aged mother. Half of the cubicle was taken up by a two-tiered locker bed. The stone floor intensified the chill of that wintry day – her bare legs were blue and chapped.

Una told me of their terrible ordeal in the hotel in town – and of how they had starved until her former amah had found them and brought them food. She re-lived the exciting prospect of their transfer to the spacious loveliness of Stanley, of the discomfort of being herded into a launch and brought out by sea in mid-winter to be dumped on the jetty and left to fend for themselves. Finally, she spoke of the bitter disappointment and despair she felt on being bundled into one of the bungalows with forty-five others where no arrangements had been made to accommodate them.

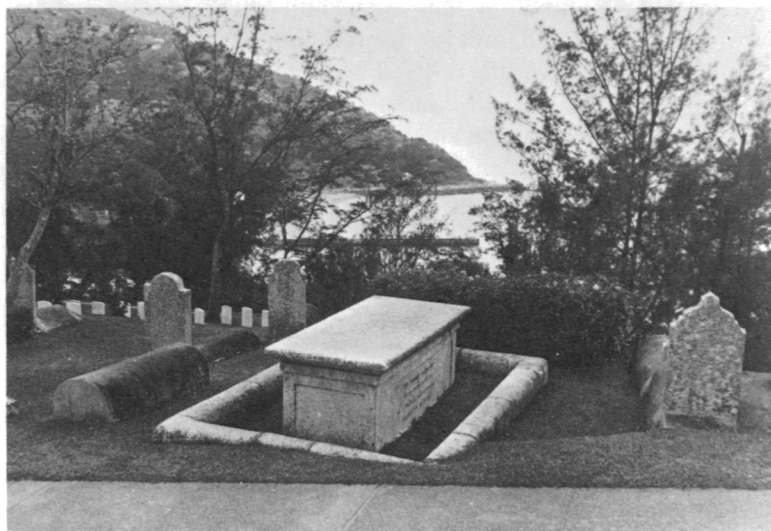
‘We were told that it was the same everywhere. No beds, no furniture, no nothing. We just lay on the floor. How I wept for Harold! To think that he had given his life so that we should suffer this ...’

Una went on to say she had been saved from the dreadful situation by the generosity of a complete stranger who explained that her father had once done him a great kindness. He led her to the cubicle which seemed like heaven compared to where they were. She nearly lost it, though – when she came back with her mother and the baby, a clergyman and his wife were in occupation and no amount of pleading would budge them. It was not until she sought the help of the stranger, who brought along a couple of tough friends, that she was able to regain possession. I was to learn that this was typical of the selfish attitude of many in the camp, which in some cases did not alter throughout the years.

Leaving the Married Quarters I walked down the hill to the main road which ends at the gates of Stanley Prison. It was a point to be avoided for there was a sentry on permanent duty, to whom all passing internees had to bow. There was actually no disgrace in this simple act of military courtesy, for even high-ranking Japanese officers got out of their cars to do so, but sheer cussedness on our part made us rebel against the decree. We hated doing it.

As Stanley Prison lay outside the camp, I had to walk under the shadow of its high wall to cross from east to west. There a footpath, after skirting the gaol gardens, climbed up northwards and led to the quiet low-walled cemetery. Some of the graves of those who had died in this lonely outpost of Great Britain had lain silent beneath the casuarina trees for a century. Nothing seemed to disturb its calm serenity – even the burial of those doctors and nurses who died in the hospital massacre and the dead soldiers reclaimed from the hillsides. When we, the internees, used the footpath to and from St Stephen’s to the Married Quarters or the camp hospital we stepped





The old cemetery.

quietly. Sometimes we rested under the trees in silent contemplation or to escape the sordidness of camp life, for the forlorn the cemetery was a haven, just as it was the final resting place for those who did not come through. It was a miracle that in all the years of internment deaths among internees came to less than one hundred and thirty. Among them were seven executed by the Japanese in October 1943 and fourteen killed by accident in an Allied air raid in January 1945.

At the northern or upper end of the cemetery, footpaths led into College property connecting half a dozen bungalows where, in normal times, resided its senior teaching staff. In each of the three nearer ones, designated A, B and C, lived an assortment of about fifty internees. In spite of the overcrowding, the other three College bungalows, D, E and F, remained out of bounds until the middle of 1943. The one comfort in this congested area was its seclusion in a setting of a variety of natural shrubs and small trees through which their inmates could see and hear Stanley Bay. Down a steep bank on the far side was the military road, leading from Stanley Village, past a two-storey house for single masters, the Prep School, and the jetty, and winding its way up to the fort and barracks on Bluff Head.

The Prep School was not occupied by internees – perhaps it was too far out to be included within the camp perimeter – but the masters' house, which was within the barbed wire fence, was filled to capacity with single men.

In their seclusion, with their backs to the rest of the camp, the bungalows, with the masters' house below, formed almost a separate colony. The hastily erected fence was probably badly secured for it was from this area that two separate parties made successful escapes one night in March – about two months after they had gone into captivity. Each party included a woman and both parties finally reached Chungking, the wartime seat of the Chinese government. However, a party of four men leaving a month later from the Science Building of the College was not so fortunate. They were captured the day after their escape only a short distance from Stanley. The Japanese authorities paraded them through the streets of Hong Kong and then gaoled them in Stanley Prison. From some parts of the camp we could see them crossing the prison compound dressed in convict clothing. They were unexpectedly allowed to rejoin the camp at the end of 1944. They never spoke of their ordeal, nor did anyone question them.

The two successful escapes shocked the authorities and security was sharply tightened. Morning and evening roll-calls were made. The masters' house was closed, causing increased congestion. The barbed wire fence was repaired, strengthened and lit up at night. But the escapes boosted morale. Not only did the escapees carry lists of our names rolled inside toilet paper so that our relatives would soon have news of us but, we felt certain that, when the British government knew of the terrible conditions in the camp, it would act immediately to effect our early repatriation. Deliverance would not, could not, be far away.

St Stephen's College buildings were numbered 8 to 11. The main building had the shape of the letter H, the two perpendicular strokes having two storeys. Above the classrooms on the lower floors were dormitories and cubicles. In the H cross-stroke was a large concert hall. Single men who had come to the College building for accommodation were luckier than the people who went to the main blocks. A friend told me that they had found that the upstairs cubicles contained two or three hospital iron beds and some furniture, and there were even luxuries like cutlery, plates and other useful equipment. However, it was not until they saw what it was

like in other quarters that they fully appreciated their good fortune: few had the luxury of beds and furniture, and cutlery besides.

The Science Block adjacent to the main building and a smaller block nearby were occupied by members of our police force. From there the approach road to St Stephen's sloped down to join the main road which I had crossed earlier. This main road actually bisected the camp, with the school property on the west (Stanley Bay) side and the prison officers' and warders' quarters spread in groups on the other side overlooking Tytam Bay on the east.

On a slight rise, immediately opposite the junction of the approach road with the main road, stood two large godowns, stocked with all manner of food supplies. We soon learnt that these were not for us – we could only stare across at them with the desperate longing of the hungry.

It was not wise to venture north of the road junction which soon reached the waist of the peninsula and the barbed wire fence. I therefore turned to the right, south, and passed on my left the Prison Officers' Club, a clean-looking building where, once a week, we waited interminably in long canteen queues. Adjoining the Club was a small two-storey building we called the Dutch Block where Dutch nationals were interned and, later, in 1943, the Norwegians. Beyond the Club and still on the left-hand side of the road were several open garages: one served as a depot for the lorry that brought our rations, while the others were used for a time as a kitchen for the Indian blocks below.

Going down a few steps by the garages, I followed a rough path that took me to the Indian Quarters. The mosque at its entrance was put out of bounds to avoid trouble. Below it were six ugly red-brick blocks, their roofs covered with malthoid on which we later built our first garden; they spread in horseshoe formation around three sides of a football field which was promptly dubbed the Village Green. A seventh block at the far end housed several Indian families, while a few Indians lived in the mosque.

Many of the buildings bore marks of shelling and bombing by the Japanese. The flats still intact were immediately filled by the last internees to arrive, who were mainly well-to-do Peak residents and a group from the University. Apparently the Japanese sought to humiliate the élite by assigning them to the poorest type of accommodation in the camp.

I lived in the Indian Quarters for over three years and got to



Our first garden made on the roof of Block 18 (foreground), in the alcoves of which tomatoes were grown. The main garden lay on the slope between Block 18 and the beach.  
(Photographs: Rudy Khoo)

know it well. All seven blocks were of standard construction and were numbered 12 to 18. Four had three levels of flats and the rest two storeys. In all the blocks save one the flats had two rooms. Each flat had a washroom fitted with a tap and a native-styled lavatory. The so-called kitchen also had a tap. Stone benches ran along two sides but there were no stove or cooking utensils whatsoever – the Indians had cooked their meals on small charcoal burners which they had taken away. A balcony extended across the front of the two rooms and an open passage ran through the back. Apart from two fixed shelves in the corners, both rooms were entirely bare, and the only decoration on the walls were blotches of stale blood caused by bedbugs having been squashed against the rough whitewashed walls.

Four internees – usually two married couples – shared the larger room, while three occupied the smaller. There was no segregation of the sexes. One or two internees bought beds from the Indians. Many slept on camp stretchers. Those who had neither stretched out on the stone floor until the Red Cross sent in further supplies.

Some of the more enterprising used a wooden board or plank placed across hollow concrete blocks which the Air Raid Precautions authorities had specially made for splinter screens. Throughout the whole camp they were the most popular type of furniture because of their multiple uses.

The rooms in the flats were so tiny that when four camp stretchers were set up there was barely the space to move, especially if the occupants happened to have purchased a table or chair from the departing Indians. Some folded their beds during the day. Strangely enough, in the smaller of the rooms, which I was later to share with the Faids, we were able to keep a small table under the shelves as well as two folding camp chairs. Bill came home one day carrying the table on his back: someone at St Stephen's had taken down his door to make two tables which he sold for HK\$5 each. Jeanne had brought the chairs from her home – one of those strange decisions which she had had the foresight to make. She probably thought they could be used on the beach. We left our beds standing all the time – although this arrangement didn't leave much space in between, it was convenient. No heating or floor-covering gave relief from the icy winds which sometimes swept across the bay and came through the ill-fitting windows: the chill of the stone floors alone was sufficient to give us cold feet and chilblains. At least internees in the Indian Quarters enjoyed a distinct advantage over the rest of the camp: one washroom had to serve only seven people, instead of the thirty to fifty.

Bill and Jeanne Faid lived in one of the taller blocks (Number 13) around the football field, where I had visited them before joining the camp. They now hoped to get into the small two-storey Block 18 facing the sea and, knowing that my stay in the hospital could only be temporary, they suggested that I should try to move in with them, making the threesome of a small room. I made an immediate application to the Housing Committee.

From the Indian Quarters a rough track followed the coastline to complete the circuit back to Tweed Bay Hospital. In an isolated spot behind the hospital was situated a small building where, in normal times, leprosy cases from Stanley Prison were segregated. Known to us as the Leprosarium, it housed the Tweed Bay medical staff. They were thus attached to, and drew their rations from, the hospital. Later on, when tuberculosis became more prevalent, the building was used as a sanatorium.

Finally, strategically placed on the highest rise between the cemetery and the main road, were two nice looking bungalows belonging to the Prison Commissioner and his assistant. These were the only prison buildings occupying the Stanley Bay side of the main road. They had been reserved for the use of the Japanese Camp Commandant and his staff. Not only did they overlook the prison, but they were in an excellent position to watch every movement in our camp.

This, then, was to be a home for some three thousand of us for three and a half long years. When American nationals were repatriated in June 1942, and the Canadians in September of the year following, some of our most acute accommodation problems were a little eased. The discomforts of overcrowding for a night or two can be endured by anyone without ill effect, but when it is a matter not of days but of years the situation takes on a vastly different aspect. There were, of course, other problems as well: uncertainty of outlook, complete isolation, starving conditions and deprivation of the simplest needs. No wonder the situation sometimes drove us to utter despondency. There were a few who firmly believed that they would never live to see the outside world again. Some never did.

As the weather began to turn warm, a possible outbreak of tropical disease engaged the attention of our health authorities. They realized that the internees were in poor condition, and there was a desperate shortage of sulphur drugs – penicillin was not as yet in general use. All possible precautions were taken but, because of the lack of sufficient fuel, drinking water could not be boiled. Good habits of a lifetime were carelessly discarded. Children ate out of dirty tins, drank water from gutters and did not bother to wash their hands even after using the lavatory.

Dysentery broke out in April 1942 and, fearing an epidemic, our ward in the hospital was cleared in readiness for emergency use. We were moved to two rooms in the Married Quarters, and my elderly roommate and I found ourselves packed into the smaller of the rooms with three mothers and their four children. I pressed the Housing Committee for immediate transfer while my companion, who had not made any application to move, viewed my impending departure with dismay.

Strangely enough, her problem was resolved sooner than mine, due to her own enterprise. She rushed in one day in great excitement

to tell me that she had found an unoccupied corner under the back stairs. A friend was giving her a piece of material to make a curtain, and the Housing Committee had agreed to her moving whenever she wished.

She celebrated her forthcoming emancipation by sharing with us a tiny tinned Christmas pudding – one of those generous gestures more appreciated because of its unexpectedness. Not only was it a rare treat for her roommates, it gave her real happiness. Even after I left the Married Quarters I used to look in on her occasionally. Her tiny cubby-hole could in no way be classed as a luxury apartment, but it provided the desired privacy and doubtless saved her sanity at a most critical time.

Permission for my own move was granted a fortnight later and I wasted no time in joining the Faids in Block 18 facing Tytam Bay. I could hardly regret parting with the mothers and their babies and, with renewed hope, quickly settled down in my new home in the Indian Quarters.

---

<sup>1</sup>Prior to the outbreak of hostilities the official rate of exchange was £1 to 17 Japanese yen and HK\$16. The military yen, introduced during the occupation, was given a parity with the Hong Kong dollar initially. Then the value of the dollar was halved, and then quartered. Finally it was illegalized. At the rate of HK\$4 to one military yen, the latter had a face-value of five shillings, making four military yen equal to one pound sterling.

## ***Chapter Five***

If living conditions presented a grim picture, food in the camp was infinitely worse. Having neither the space nor the facilities to be self-supporting, Hong Kong has always been forced to import most of its food supply. A little was grown in the New Territories certainly, but the staple diet, rice, came mainly from China or Indo-China, and pork, fowl and vegetables were brought from across the border and beyond. Meat and flour for European consumption were imported from Australia or New Zealand; the finest beef came from Scotland. Chinese people seldom ate beef, but when the local water-buffalo grew too old for work in the ricefields they were sent to the slaughter houses to supplement the meat supply. Hong Kong, however, supported a large and flourishing fishing industry so that, failing all else, there should have been no shortage of fresh fish.

However, the basic camp ration supplied by Japan consisted of rice – a pound a day for each man, woman and child – a few buffalo bones, and small quantities of meat which disappeared in the cooking or, alternatively, bad fish. Poor quality vegetables – stale pumpkin was a favourite, or water spinach which had neither taste nor food-value – made up the main delivery on better days. On some days the vegetables were rotted or sodden, having been salvaged from sea or river when the supply boats were attacked by Allied air-raiders.

Flour was a rare luxury but, having no means in the early days for baking bread, this was added to the stew or made into heavy dumplings. When the tide of war turned against Japan we had neither flour, meat nor fish for the best part of two years in camp. Issues of sugar, tea and peanut oil – a few ounces to last ten days – made up our total diet. Salt was seldom thought of and many soon suffered muscular cramp, a complaint which was quickly alleviated when the authorities were persuaded to grant permission for sea water to be drawn from the beaches for cooking. (This was quite a concession because it meant crossing the perimeter fence.) Not only did it



control the cramp, but the flavour of both rice and vegetables was much improved.

The van from the Medical Department continued to call daily and hospital patients continued to have their slice of bread. Children were given a little milk. After about a year, the International Red Cross, administered by the Swiss Consul, supplemented our rations with bran and soybean. The bran was mixed with the rice, and the bean – a dessertspoonful daily – was issued with our morning meal. Had a good supply of this food, so rich in protein and vitamin B, been introduced earlier, it might have made some impact on the general deterioration in the health of internees but, by the time it was issued, almost everyone had suffered vitamin deficiencies in one form or other.

The Japanese had no excuse for starving us. The British government each month remitted through the Red Cross £10,000 for the relief of civilian internees, war prisoners and the many people in town holding British papers who were not interned. Furthermore, not only in the two godowns within the camp, but in many other godowns placed throughout the island, adequate food supplies had been stored against just such an emergency. Instead of making this available to us, the food was shipped to feed Japan. It would have been a simple matter to have arranged for food to be brought from the Chinese mainland which had long come under their control. Alternatively they could have obtained supplies from Formosa (Taiwan). Not until Allied naval forces regained ascendancy over the Pacific late in 1943 did Hong Kong suffer any effective blockade of shipping. Official policy appeared to be a determination to starve the prisoners, and starved we were.

The ration lorry came in each morning. Our Colonial Veterinary Surgeon waited to inspect and, if considered necessary, to reject as inedible, the meat provided. When this happened, internees did without. Only once do I recall having tinned herring as a substitute. It was when I was still in the Married Quarters. There were nine, including four babies, in our room to share the one tin of herring provided. I was out when it was issued and I remember feeling quite pleased on my return to see half a fish on my plate instead of the usual stew.

However, my friend whispered that, as there were seven herrings in the tin and only nine of us, I should have had more. On enquiring, I found that even though her child was too young to eat its share of

fish its mother, who had collected the tin and made the division, had kept almost two whole herrings for herself. That even she was ashamed was quite obvious: another bit was hastily added to my plate. What a thing to argue about – .28 of one herring!

Although our diet kept us from outright starvation, it proved completely inadequate for the maintenance of reasonable health. It is true that rice is the traditional diet of the local population, and only manual workers would have anywhere near a pound a day, but it is eaten with sufficient protein – pork, fowl, fish or beans – and plenty of greens to counteract any deficiency which might occur. Even the poorest families would include salted fish and cabbage or preserved soybean in every meal. Besides, the monotony of cold tasteless stew eaten with even colder rice excited no interest. Only twice did we have any variation from the stringy meat or bad fish. The first occasion occurred during our first summer when, for about a week, pork arrived each day in the ration lorry. This was not due to any intention to make our food more palatable but only because disease had broken out in the pig farm in the New Territories and the entire herd had to be slaughtered. The second treat came much later. The blockade to shipping had brought a closure of refrigerated storage facilities at the Dairy Farm where huge supplies of turkey and pheasant had been laid in for the Christmas season when hostilities broke out in 1941. The Japanese had a feast of turkey but, because they disliked game, pheasant was sent into the camp to replace our meat ration. The game was a welcome change and the children derived some amusement from wearing headgear made of feathers.

Supplies were divided soon after arrival and, until wheelbarrows became available, workers carried the loads on their shoulders to the various quarters of the camp. How much disappeared on the way is anybody's guess – internees became very adept at filching and kitchen workers were not slow to use their advantage. It is not surprising, therefore, that when rations came to be served, they often ran out before the end of the queue was reached.

Food was prepared in communal kitchens and served twice daily, nominally at 11 a.m. and at 5 p.m. These times varied constantly, particularly in the Indian Quarters, which depended entirely on the availability of firewood. In normal times gas was supplied only to the kitchens of foreign homes, the local population preferring to use firewood imported from Borneo. On the day that I joined the Indian

Quarters, their first meal was served at 2.30 p.m., followed by the second at 4 p.m. because of the necessity to conserve fuel. When our kitchen was later moved into Block 17, two ounces of the rice ration were set aside for a light meal of congee at 8 a.m. This morning snack, especially during the cold weather, gave some relief to the terrible pangs of night starvation. The relief did not last, however: congee, cooked with rice alone, has no substance and we were hungry again in no time at all. We were to learn that rice, while filling the stomach rapidly, soon turns to water. It lacks the long sustaining quality of wheat.

No kitchen equipment had been supplied by the Japanese, but we found that for cooking large quantities of rice, dustbins, when cleaned out, provided a tolerable substitute. There is an art to rice cooking. The Chinese are past masters, but even a competent Chinese cook required a special type of boiler, sufficient fuel and a good stove, to turn it into a food which is palatable and easily digested.

When later we were allowed to draw two ounces of our allowance in an uncooked form, my friends expected me to show them the correct method of preparing rice. I hadn't the least idea. Chinese cooks seldom refer to recipes and, in any case, as children we were not even allowed in the kitchen. However, I did remember hearing some remark about sufficient water being added to the grain in the pan until it covered the back of one's hand. Jeanne laughed outright at this unscientific theory. Even when I explained that the amount of water was not a critical matter, because rice absorbs almost any reasonable quantity, she remained unconvinced. Finally, after I suggested that the secret lay not in the exact proportion of water used but in the practice of not lifting the pan lid for, say, twenty minutes after boiling, she decided to give my theory a trial. To her immense surprise and my great satisfaction, we obtained perfectly boiled rice.

I took over the duties of queuing. Although they were time-consuming and most tiresome, the queues were to me an unending source of interest. It was here that news was spread and every rumour had its origin and, indeed, over the years I managed to gather many useful hints that were to stand us in good stead. I remember learning one day that banana skin was edible. Bananas are normally plentiful in Hong Kong, although they are not grown in any large quantity, and occasionally they were sold at the canteen. However, we could only afford one banana at a time which, like everything else, we

shared between three of us. One day in the queue I proudly described the pleasing result I had using banana skin as a shoe cleaner. I was at once told that this was wasteful: banana skin fried in a few drops of peanut oil gave it the taste of mushroom.

Bill and Jeanne were beginning to respect the bits of information I brought in and the very next time we had a banana my new recipe was tried out. We found that although it lacked the flavour of mushroom it certainly helped Bill get his rice down. It may seem strange when we were so hungry, but many people who were unused to eating rice except in the form of a milk pudding had difficulty in swallowing even the smallest quantity without the help of a sprinkling of sugar or a little milk. Bill was one of these people. His weight dropped from a normal fifteen stone to nine stone within the first three months of internment. Until he became accustomed to eating rice, his meals were a nightmare – yet he was hungry all the time.

In an inspired moment Jeanne had included in her packing for the camp a food carrier widely used by Chinese families for sending hot meals to children at school. It proved to be one of our most useful assets. Her carrier consisted of three baked enamel dishes which fitted one on top of the other, with a lid for the top dish. A specially designed handle held the three together, making it possible to carry the set in one hand with safety and ease. Bill would remind me to go to the Reverend Alton, however long his queue might be, because he was the only one to give a fair measure, and off I would stroll and climb the path leading to the open garages to join the longest queue.

As no contact was permitted between the town and the camp, all maintenance and repair work had to be done by internees with substitute materials and makeshift tools. As a consequence every job, however small, took ages to complete. At long last the one remaining war-damaged Block 17 in the Indian Quarters was ready for occupation and the police were transferred from the Science Block of St Stephen's. The new block was of two storeys and, instead of flats on the upper floor, there were two rows of cubicles, with a central passage along its entire length. A large hall occupied the entire ground floor. This now served as a communal kitchen for all seven blocks. The police took over the duties of collecting rations from the depot, cooking and serving the food and attending the grass boiler as well. They did a fine job.

In the queue one day the subject of our discussion centred

around rising costs in the canteen. I mentioned that during my first week in camp I had met a young man one evening – one of our own internees – who tried to sell me a tin of golden syrup. He wanted HK\$12<sup>1</sup> – Hong Kong currency was still being used and had not been devalued. He had also a small packet of Australian Cheddar which he said was a bargain at \$8. The normal cost of these commodities at that time was about \$1.00 and 60¢ respectively. I thought the prices were exorbitant and told him so, but I later regretted not having taken advantage of his offer because such things were no longer available at any cost. Even the most inferior type of slab sugar – commonly known as *wongtong*, the only sugar available – was being sold at the canteen for twice the price of the syrup.

When I asked how the young man had got hold of those things, there was a frozen silence. However, I was later told that when the police were up at St Stephen's, there had been nothing for them to do – they loafed around, swore at one another, or just sat and stared at the godowns opposite. I was reminded that the rank and file of the force consisted of young men, many of them drawn from the slums of Glasgow, Liverpool or the Tyneside, and asked to imagine how they must have felt: tons of food which rightfully belonged to us and all they could do was to think about it – which made them hungrier still.

I was told that some of them began scouting around at night and soon devised a scheme to raid the stores. Comparatively little was taken to begin with – mainly tinned stuff like corned beef, soups and butter from Australia. They gorged themselves and buried the rest on the hillsides. It happened that one of them managed to sell a tin one day, and they realized that a fortune could be made by exploiting their fellow internees. It was impossible to conceal their sudden affluence. Their movements were watched and the rest of the block joined in the raid.

It was said that the godowns had contained sufficient food to last the entire camp for six months. 'The bloody raids were thorough and highly systematic. They even posted men on point duty to direct traffic: bully beef? – this way; butter? – over there; sugar? – just around the corner. Parties of raiders worked the bloody night through while peddlars disposed of the stuff each day. Even 240-lb. bags of rice were taken and hidden under their bloody beds!'

I wondered vaguely how the Commissioner and senior officers

didn't know that this was happening. If they did they kept their eyes closed. Law and order as such no longer existed, and if it came to a show-down no one could be disciplined except by the Japanese. We were rather like sheep without a shepherd in those early days – sullen and dispirited sheep at that. Most people felt that they had been let down during the fighting. Immediately after our surrender the Governor, Sir Mark Young, had been taken away to a prison camp in Formosa, and the Colonial Secretary, Mr F.C. Gimson, was kept in town to hand over to the Japanese – not that either would have had much influence over the internees. They had arrived in Hong Kong only shortly before the outbreak of hostilities and were quite unknown. Under the surface apathy, however, was a turmoil of recrimination and bitterness. Instances of graft were cited in the allocation of accommodation and the presence of women and children, many of them families of government servants who had defied the evacuation order, complicated a generally difficult situation.

One fine morning rice grains on the road aroused suspicion. The trail led to our police block. Before the search party reached it, the police internees began frantically to throw their loot into the bushes. What they couldn't hide they flushed down the lavatories. It was a wicked thing to do when so many were starving and the food could have been shared by the whole camp, but the culprits could not afford to be caught. People do strange things under strange circumstances. Had our own representative known about it, an approach might have been made to the authorities to release the supplies for the camp. But in all probability the request would have been turned down.

The culprits were punished of course. They were given half rations for a week and the entire block was restricted until they were transferred to the newly repaired Indian Block. It could have been worse. In their new home they were required to take over heavy communal duties which were getting beyond some of the older folk.

A scheme for extra food was introduced whereby workers received an extra half or whole ration, depending on the type of work they did. Whatever the quantity given, it hardly made up for the extra energy expended even though it added to the feeling of physical satisfaction for a while. On an ordinary ration, some of the men hardly knew that they had eaten at all. Pregnant women were also granted double rations on the assumption that they had to feed two. Some were pregnant when they entered Stanley: others, in

order to get the extra ration, managed in spite of the lack of privacy to achieve this status. There were, however, only about forty-five babies born in internment. Some of the pregnancies turned out to be merely symptoms of hormonal dysfunction caused by the rice diet. Until this condition was recognized by the doctors more than one unattached woman had been acutely embarrassed. Many of the mothers-to-be did not eat their extra rations, however, but drew them only for husband or lover as the case might be.

It is impossible to describe the physical hunger we endured in those early days in camp. Whatever the topic of conversation it turned invariably to food. We thought about it by day and dreamed of it at night. Yet there were those who shared their miserable rations with the pets they had smuggled in, though one by one these disappeared. There were rumours that in town people ate newborn babies.

After the arrival of the police in the Indian Quarters the distribution of food was better organized. A rotation for the first service was instituted for the seven blocks. A gong sounded the second numeral of the block number for its inmates to queue up, and much waiting-time was saved. Besides the three queues for meals and those for other rations, there were at least four for hot water. There was no marking of roll cards for water queues but, unless there were no takers, no one was allowed to draw from two successive queues. I enjoyed the early morning queue most of all. Always an early riser, it was no hardship to get up for hot water at 6.45 a.m. for our first cup of tea. The sea was calm at this hour, its peace disturbed only by a faint ripple caused by the sudden turn of a fish finding itself too close to shore.

Jeanne had a tea basket – a Chinese teapot set within a padded rattan container. The tea was measured carefully – one miserly teaspoonful. Should we run out before the next issue, pine-needles, said to be rich in vitamin C, proved a fair substitute – the brew was hot and wet anyway. Inspector Joe Witcroft, affectionately nicknamed ‘Smokey Joe’, was in charge of the huge copper, which he stoked with grass. This was brought in by a band of volunteer grass-cutters who each day picked over the undergrowth on the hillsides which with time became bare. I looked forward to Smokey Joe’s cheerful ‘Good morning’, a pleasant change from the grumblers who found the thought of another day unbearable and answered my greeting with, ‘What’s so good about it?’

Hot water during the day was served from two electric coppers which had been transferred from the laundries of the main blocks. Because of their smaller capacity, the supply often ran out. The frequency of the water queues, the selfishness of some who drew their ration whether or not it was needed, and the disappointment suffered by those who had waited in vain gave rise to more friction than almost any other single inconvenience we had to put up with in the camp.

---

<sup>1</sup> Exchange rate for HK\$1 = 1/3 (stg.) in 1941.



## ***Chapter Six***

When our first Easter came, the Japanese gave each child a duck's egg – they seemed to have a fondness for children which was quite incongruous with some of their other characteristics. From then on, eggs could be bought from the canteen. By then, too, we were getting an occasional grant of a few yen from the fund sent by the British government but, like bananas, we could afford only one egg at a time. Prices never came down, but this did not stop me from getting an idea: I suggested to the Faids that if we could stretch to several eggs on the next canteen day, I would be willing to try to hatch them. I remembered that I had seen eggs being hatched in a shop in Kowloon: all one did was to heat the room initially and then cover the trays of eggs with a padded quilt. I thought that if I took the eggs to bed with me at night and kept them covered with blankets during the day, they would ultimately hatch.

When Bill asked what I would do with them when they hatched, I said I would have to keep them in the bedroom until they were old enough to go into the kitchen, and until then I would have to sleep with them in my bed at night.

Jeanne vetoed the idea. Even the thought of a nice juicy duckling could not induce her to put up with having them in *her* bedroom at night. Perhaps it was just as well. We continued to share the occasional scrambled egg.

It was about this time that weekly food parcels began to arrive from outside the camp. The first came as a real surprise. Whatever the reason behind it, friends were suddenly permitted to send regular weekly parcels to all camps. They were limited to one parcel each which was not to exceed five pounds in weight. Having relatives in town I seldom failed to get one and, like everything else, it was shared in our mess. We all benefited from the little extras, but the joy of receiving them meant more to me than the food.

Before long the large business houses like the British and American Tobacco Company, Shell, Jardine's and others had organ-

ized regular parcels for their employees. The firms underwrote the cost to be settled at the end of the war. The Vice-Chancellor managed a modest arrangement for University staff. The parcels made a real contribution and whether they included jam or dripping (rumoured to be from human fat), milk powder or dried egg, they relieved the monotony of our diet. The internees were all too conscious of, and fully appreciated, the fact that they had been sent at considerable risk – association with enemy aliens was definitely not encouraged. As time went on, the growing support for the camp made it apparent that the tide of war had turned in our favour, and we knew that Hong Kong's faith in the British had been fully restored.

13/9/42 -	24/12/43	3/4 (An Shing Cheung)
1 tin Peanut Butter	Dried Sweet Potatoes	1 tin Lard
1 tin Golden Syrup.	5 Cans 2 lbs.	1 tin Wong Tong
1 tin Tomatoes	Potatoes 2 lbs.	1 tin Sliced Beans
1 tin Mushroom Sauce	Chinese Cabbage	1 cty potatoes
1 tin Edible Potatoes	Biscuits	1 cty carrots
2/10	14/1/44	17/4 (An Choy)
1 tin Fat.	1 tin Tomato Paste	1 tin Pork Beans
1 tin Beans.	1 tin Sweet Cucumber	1 " Honey Beans
2 pkts Bisto	1 tin biscuits	1 " Sardines
1 Bundle onion	1 pkt Wong Tong	1 " Potted Meat
4 tin Potatoes	1 pkt Sweet Potatoes	1 " Corn
14/10.	1 Bdl Ground	6/5 (An Choy)
1 tin Peanut Butter	8 Sweet Potatoes	1 lb Margarine
1 tin Bean Cnd	28/1/44	1 cty Beans
6 Potatoes	1 lb Margarine	1 " Wong Tong
1 tin Biscuits	1 tin Jam	1 tin Sweet Potatoes
1 tin Jam	1 pkt dried S.P.	1 tin Sliced Beans.
25/10	1 catty S. Por.	12/6 (An Choy)
1 tin Golden Syrup.	2 pkts Bisto	1 lb Margarine
1 tin Mixed Green	11/1/44	1 lb Egg yolk
1 tin Mushroom Sauce	1 tin Syrup	1 tin Rice Biscuits
	1 tin Cucumber	1 cty potatoes
	1 tin Beans (Vila)	23/6 (An Choy)
	1 catty English Potatoes	1 tin Wong Tong

Record of food parcels received from town during internment.

That difficulties should arise from food generally and from parcels in particular was to be expected, but they were brought about not so much by the Japanese, although they never failed to withhold distribution of parcels as punishment for minor misdemeanours, such as failing to bow to sentries on duty. The main trouble was from our own people.

Some of the British felt that were it not for the many Eurasians in the camp there would be sufficient food for them. Racial discrimination had by no means moderated in the face of general adversity, and some people were too bigoted to understand that the food was provided, not in a lump quantity, but rationed by the Japanese according to the number of mouths to be fed. Then there were those who, failing to get parcels themselves, became increasingly jealous of those who did. They were envious not of the large business houses whose parcels came regularly and had to be paid for at the end of the war – the main target of their resentment was again the Eurasian community whose relatives in town sent parcels from sheer solicitude and often at much personal sacrifice. One of our neighbours worked himself into a bad humour on each parcel day. He repeatedly advocated the pooling of all parcels, even though less than ten per cent of internees received them, and the contents divided equally between the three thousand others. It is interesting to note that this same gentleman and his wife, living on bare rations, became pitifully emaciated so that they had to draw regular extras from the health clinic. Whenever vitamins became available, they were among the first to get them. We were all stunned to find at the end of internment that, instead of eating the contents of their comfort parcels from the Red Cross, they saved intact at least one parcel each, besides tins of corned beef, presumably for a rainy day.

Red Cross supplies were a real godsend. We received three consignments. The first came from Britain on the American repatriation ship, *Asama Maru*, in June 1942, but it was three months before the Japanese authorities made the distribution. We each received two comfort parcels and, for about six months after this, bulk supplies of tinned meat, sugar, cocoa, tea and dried fruit were distributed every month. Ovens had been built in the communal kitchens and flour was kept for baking bread – and what lovely bread it was, too. Some desperately needed drugs were included, and clothing in the form of woollen khaki tunics helped us over the first winter.

When the Canadians were repatriated in September 1943, the Canadian Red Cross sent three comfort parcels for each person but there were no bulk supplies. The last consignment reached us in February 1945. By this time, general starvation seemed imminent and rumour gave out that the parcels, coming from the American Red Cross, each weighed thirty-three pounds. An extravagant list of contents circulated throughout the camp. Hopes for relief soared daily so that disappointment, when it came, was all the more acute. We received only one parcel each – leftovers from the 1942 British consignment – and four (not four packets of) American cigarettes. With Hong Kong's heat and high humidity the chocolates and cheese in the parcels had become blocks of green mould and the tins were rusty or bloated. The gift from the United States had been shipped to Japan.

One of my most vivid memories of Stanley is associated with the bulk supplies of 1942. The extras were widely welcomed and deeply appreciated, but we experienced a desperate shortage of containers for storage. The only way to cope with the situation was to indulge in immediate feasts, to be followed by famine until the next issue a month later. But we couldn't gorge the lot at once and predators were plentiful. Wherever we hid the supplies, the ants found the sugar and cockroaches emerged from the drains and flew in through door and window to crawl over the food. Just at this time I had been sent in a parcel from town a pomelo (a citrus fruit similar to a grapefruit in appearance and about four times its size). I knew that its skin was considered a delicacy in Chinese cuisine and we had saved it after eating the fruit. Jeanne had a great idea: she used it with our monthly ration of sugar to make marmalade.

We had our first taste of pomelo marmalade at the evening meal. It was absolutely delicious. The rest went into a large jar which I had saved from the malt and cod-liver oil given to me by the DMS when he had brought me into the camp. I cleared the table and picked up the jar to place it on the shelf when, to my horror, it slipped from nerveless fingers and crashed to smithereens on the stone floor. The fact that this was not a case of carelessness but a symptom of a vitamin B deficiency did nothing to alleviate my distress at the disaster. I felt guilty and utterly wretched.

The story had a happy ending, however. With a word of comfort, Bill went on his hands and knees and scooped up the remains. 'Don't worry, Jean,' he said. 'We'll save it.' He spent hours melting

the marmalade again and, after straining and washing every single piece of peel to remove every bit of glass, asked Jeanne to boil it up once more. His verdict that the second cooking had improved its flavour and consistency only increased my gratitude.

Our private facilities for cooking were quite different from that of the communal kitchen. The kitchens in the tiny flats of the Indian Quarters had no cookers. But I had brought into the camp an electric hotplate. Jeanne had a frying pan as well as a saucepan so our only problem was finding the food to cook. Others who were not so well equipped used hotplates made in the camp. Electric elements could be bought at high cost from the Formosan<sup>1</sup> guards who smuggled them in at night. The guards used this sort of thing as part payment for pieces of jewellery or even bits of gold filling which some people dug out from their teeth. The elements were set into channels grooved out of flat tiles, known as Canton tiles. With all the damage done to the buildings, the odd tile could always be found lying around. It says a good deal for the high standard of Hong Kong's electricity regulations when one considers the heavy load on the power supply: almost every mess in the camp – and there might be four, or even five, messes in a flat – had its own cooker. All would be in use at the same time with no obvious overloading. Should a fuse blow, it would be replaced by a heavier one. The Japanese authorities seemed completely unaware of the amount of electricity consumed – they never bothered to read the meters. It took us the best part of a week, but we even distilled a large bucketful of sea water to give us two tomato sauce bottles of fine salt. Life was at least tolerable until the coal shortage became acute and electricity was restricted.

---

<sup>1</sup>The island of Formosa (Taiwan) was a part of the Japanese Empire at that time.

## ***Chapter Seven***

As a general rule we put on all the clothes we possessed in the winter and stripped as far as decency would allow during the summer months. Should anyone have a frock, it would be reserved for Sundays or for the occasional concert during the first two years but, with no laundry facilities to speak of, the practice decreased progressively with time.

People who had gone into the camp from their homes fared not too badly. In the intervening period between hostilities and internment they had been able to give thought to a selection of suitable clothing. Some chose wisely and were reasonably well-equipped; others brought in their most treasured possessions because they could not bear leaving them behind and were burdened with expensive clothing, hats and high-heeled shoes – things they could not use and no one else, except the thespians, wanted and put to good use. However wisely potential internees made their selection, the fact remained that they were limited to what could be carried in one or two suitcases. A friend told me that her amah, discovering her a prisoner in a Chinese hotel, had rushed to her flat to return with all her precious crystal carefully packed within the folds of her evening dresses. All had been tied with a sheet to form a Dick Whittington bundle. From this collection she selected a vase which she still treasures and three favourite frocks which she later donated to the theatrical pool. The rest she was forced to leave in the hotel.

Having planned for a stay of only a few days at the University when I left my home on 8 December 1941, I had only the clothes I wore – slacks, jumper and jacket. In the suitcase I carried were a dress, pyjamas and changes of underclothing. These had not filled the case so I threw in my fur coat. It did not appear to have been a necessity because, although we were into December, a bright sun was shining and we seemed set for our usual spell of fine, warm weather. I took it nevertheless, having decided that it could be useful if I had occasion to go out at night. The coat, a dyed marmot

with a mink collar, was hardly suitable for camp wear, but marmot is a hardy fur and when the cold winds swept across the bay I was grateful for its protection. I must have looked strange in fur coat, slacks and bare feet hurrying to join the food queue.

I am told that the Geneva Convention specifies that clothing, underwear and footwear should be supplied to prisoners of war by the detaining power, and regular replacement and repair should be assured. The power which detained *us* supplied nothing and, were it not for the fact that many of the 'haves' in the camp gave generously to the 'have-nots', I really don't know how some would have managed in the cold of the first winter. It was just as well that no one expected our internment to last for so long because, in time, the 'haves' joined the ranks of their less fortunate friends and they, too, went without. Imagine not being able to replace anything one ran out of, knowing full well that it would not be for a day or two but for as long as we remained in the camp. We developed a great capacity for making do with substitutes – or learnt to do without.

Jeanne Faïd had given me two cotton dresses before leaving the University. She was of a slightly larger build than I but we were not fussy in the camp and I wore them on special occasions. However, realizing that Hong Kong's summer drags on and on, my thoughts, as the weather began to warm, turned to my sister Grace for something more appropriate for camp wear. I decided that I would have to get a message to her.

The van from the Medical Department still came in daily but we were not allowed to speak with the driver and, as it was always parked while unloading supplies outside the hospital in full view of Japanese Headquarters, I realized that it would be difficult to get any message across. I wrote a note nevertheless and waited patiently day by day for an opportunity.

The Colonial Secretary had joined the camp, but the DMS was still in town. The Japanese authorities thought highly of him and, with a skeleton staff, he had been retained indefinitely to supervise the town's health services. Others forced to remain outside were officers of British and Dutch banks, among them the Chief Manager and the Manager of the huge Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. With their staffs they were interned in one of the Chinese hotels from where they were marched under guard each day to and from their offices. Their job was to carry out liquidation of enemy assets. Not until the DMS and the heads of the Hongkong

Bank were imprisoned in the gaol in mid-1943 were their staffs sent into Stanley.

Meanwhile Selwyn gladly complied. Besides running the health services, his prolonged stay in town enabled him to maintain contact with all the camps. The wonderful work he managed to do for POWs, internees, and the people in Hong Kong will never be fully known. What was common knowledge was that he slaved tirelessly for us and stood his ground fearlessly on any point which would be to our advantage. Considering the people he had to deal with, it was only natural that he seldom succeeded in getting what he asked for, but what he could not achieve by candour he would through guile; and, autocrat that he was normally, he would suffer any indignity if he thought that by doing so he could gain something for us. Among other things, he produced desperately needed drugs and equipment for the hospitals. He even managed to have patients transported into town for X-rays. These were done at St Paul's – more commonly known as the 'French' Hospital because it was run by French nuns. With Selwyn himself living there, the hospital became a headquarters for the Medical Department in exile, as well as a meeting place for internee-patients and their contacts.

It might not be out of place here to mention the assistance the DMS received from the Reverend Kiyoshi Watanabe, a Japanese minister of the Lutheran Church, who was serving his country as an interpreter in Shamshuipo Camp. In 1966 Liam Nolan published a book<sup>1</sup> which recounts the story. Introduced to Selwyn by a mutual friend, Watanabe carried through a dangerous programme of smuggling desperately needed medical and food supplies into the camp and, later, when he was transferred to our military hospital at Bowen Road, the smuggling went on. In a postscript to the book, the DMS comments on Watanabe's courage which was all the more remarkable, he said, because he was so terrified of the consequences of exposure. At the end of 1944 Watanabe was transferred to Stanley. By this time his work with Selwyn was over – the DMS was already a prisoner in Stanley gaol. At considerable risk to his own safety, Watanabe forged a tenuous link between city and camp. I had no personal contact with him, but he won the trust of many. He attended our church services and gained the friendship of those he joined in worship.

In 1942, however, the DMS would come into Stanley on regular visits and, although we were not permitted to speak with him, we



would find pleasure in his restrained smile of acknowledgement. Not only was he our sole contact with the outside world, but the sight of him and the knowledge of the fine work he was doing seemed to give us strength to carry on. I realized naturally that there would be no question of his passing on any message to my family, but I knew that he was in touch with them and would let them know that I was well.

I carried my letter in my pocket for weeks, and one fine day an opportunity occurred. The driver had left the bonnet of his van open and had gone into the hospital for something he needed. Quickly I jammed my note into a crevice in the engine, although I had no idea how to let him know it was there.

Whatever was wrong with his engine was soon fixed and, after turning the van around, he was set to return to town. The driver's side was now sheltered from Headquarters – here lay my chance. I jumped on to his running board as he moved off and whispered to him about the note. He was furious, but there was nothing he could do under the circumstances except to slow down sufficiently for me to jump off. Some weeks later a three-piece blue linen playsuit, which I recognized as belonging to Grace, arrived in a parcel. She had obviously received my message.

Grace must have known that I would be much slimmer. Although she is smaller than I, her suit now fitted me perfectly. Furthermore it needed no ironing as long as I placed it under my bedding while slightly damp. Whenever I wore it people remarked on the freshness of its appearance. Some weeks later May Witchell gave me a pair of navy-blue drill shorts. My summer wardrobe was complete.

Hong Kong has a mild climate although the long months of heat and high humidity can prove most trying. In Stanley, though, we found the summer seasons infinitely more pleasant than the winter months. The men lived mostly in shorts alone, dispensing with shirt, singlet and socks, although a few like Frank Fisher, who was married to another of Billy's sisters, always appeared fully dressed in shirt, shorts and white cotton socks complete with well polished shoes. Frank was not a Hong Kong resident, but lived in Amoy, a Chinese port up the coast from Hong Kong, where he represented the British and American Tobacco Company and from where his wife and daughter had been evacuated to Sydney. He had been caught in Hong Kong because the plane on which he was to have returned

to Amoy was destroyed by enemy action on 8 December. In Stanley he lived with other members of BAT staff at St Stephen's.

Frank felt responsible for Mabel and me and was always ready with advice or assistance. He usually walked around to see Mabel in the morning and made a practice of visiting me each evening, often bringing with him a pair or two of socks for me to darn. I remember using up Jeanne's entire supply of white cotton over the years so that, towards the end, I had to draw threads from a piece of canvas to mend his socks. The Faids looked forward to his joining us for a cup of tea.

Women as a rule were not so well-equipped. Few had shorts with them: it was winter when we went into Stanley and, besides, shorts were not so widely worn in those days. They soon made up for the lack, though. Shorts were not so difficult to make and any available material – even flour bags – served the purpose. Of course they couldn't go around without shirts, but they soon found that sun-tops could be fashioned out of two pocket handkerchiefs.

The shorts made from flour bags were not really practicable, but the Red Cross came to the rescue with a supply of locally made cotton khaki garments intended for the missions of central Africa for distribution to young native lads. These needed drastic alterations, certainly, but turned out to be much more lasting than any made of the lighter materials used in the camp. The others, however, were not discarded; we never discarded anything. They served nicely as bathing suits when in midsummer the Japanese were persuaded to open the beach at Tweed Bay for a short period each day – the first summer, in fact, slipped by without too much discomfort from the weather.

Hong Kong is reputed to have an ideal winter when the sun shines brightly and the air is crisp and cool. In the cold days that followed, however, many were the times we longed for a return of the heat. The early months of 1942 had actually been our first taste of winter under camp conditions. We couldn't really compare it with any past experience but, as the temperature dropped on 13 February to 40°F, it must have been for many the coldest they had ever spent. They had entered camp in the cotton uniforms of air-raid wardens or the Auxiliary Nursing Service, some without even overcoats. They had been deceived by the sunshine and left stranded wherever their wartime duties took them because of the rapid deterioration of our war effort, the suspension of ferry services and the

subsequent looting of their homes. Moreover, in that first winter we had not yet learned to adapt ourselves to the food or the living conditions. There was also an acute shortage of beds and bedding. It was not surprising that people slept on the floors with all their clothes on, and, if they were fortunate enough to find a hessian bag or two, these would be heaped on top of their blankets to give added warmth. It is no reflection on their cleanliness, but merely a matter of prudence and convenience, that they did not change their clothes for days on end.

By the end of 1942, that is, the second winter, we had been reinforced with the woollen cardigans sent by the British Red Cross. Two or even three garments were issued to all who needed them. They were simply tailored and altered easily into nice-looking windbreakers for the men and skirts and slacks for the women. I made myself some very serviceable shorts which lasted me over the years, but many other uses were found for these cardigans. A couple joined together would make an extra blanket for a child, and cut-outs could be turned into smaller articles like teacosies or slippers. Those who had ideas and were clever with their fingers made attractive gifts – I still have a needle-book which Mabel gave me on one of my birthdays. She had made it in the shape of a sombrero-style hat, in the crown of which was a thimble made from a bullet shell. The book had two inside leaves on which were pinned a needle, some pins and two safety-pins, and red-wool embroidery gave it a touch of professionalism.

However, as the years wore on, loss of weight and physical and mental deterioration made us more vulnerable to the elements. The winter of 1944/5 was one of the coldest in Hong Kong's history. Day after day the temperature dropped from a normal of 50<sup>0</sup>-60<sup>0</sup>F to 40<sup>0</sup> or under, and the icy winds from central China swept in, piercing inadequate clothing and adding to our general distress.

We never enjoyed the comforts of artificial heating in Stanley – not even in the early days – although on occasion when the nights were particularly bitter and cold feet kept us lying awake, Bill would heat a couple of bricks on the hotplate to give Jeanne and me a little warmth in our beds. By the time the last winter came along, even a cup of warm tea in the long evenings had become a bygone luxury – no hot water could be served after the evening meal. The somewhat lavish supply of electricity we enjoyed at the beginning had been curtailed from the middle of 1943. This was due to the dwindling

stocks of coal which had to be imported from North China: because of the growing effectiveness of the Allied blockade of Japanese shipping, fresh stocks were difficult to obtain.

We were warned, of course, to cut down our consumption but, human nature being what it is, no one took any notice. As the situation grew worse we were rationed – a daily allowance was made for all purposes covering communal as well as private cooking, hot water, and hospital use. I can still see the tall, slim figure of our quartermaster, Paul Reveley (each block had its own quartermaster who ensured that we received the rations due to us and determined the amount of issue of anything at all in the camp). Reveley was an electrical engineer by profession and had a reputation for fair-mindedness. Armed with a slide rule, he visited each flat in turn to calculate the number of minutes each piece of equipment could be allowed. The range ran from fifteen to a maximum of thirty minutes, depending on the size of the appliance. The hotplates made in the camp were mostly of half a kilowatt in size. Ours, an imported model from British General Electric, was 750 watts. We were allowed a total of twenty-three minutes for the day. There wasn't a great deal we could do in twenty-three minutes but we never had much to cook at any one time. One woman I knew who was the epitome of neatness, and always dressed in clothes that had been freshly pressed, gave up cooking extras because she preferred to continue using her iron! By mid-1944 there was no electricity at all in the camp and it looked as if the end of our resistance was near. I doubt that many would have survived another winter similar to the one of 1944/5.

Footwear became an increasing problem. Like everything else, there was no question of repair or replacement when soles wore through, nor was everyone equipped with walking shoes. It was said that shoes of a sort were still obtainable in the city, priced at £20 a pair. This being so, even if they could have been ordered through the canteen, the cost would have been prohibitive. The Welfare – an organization formed by the DMS – provided locally made sand-shoes and these were issued free of charge to anyone in need. Most people were grateful to have them but, being of cheap quality, they stood up even less than our own shoes to the wear and tear of the rough footpaths in camp. When large holes made them unserviceable they were reinforced with cardboard insoles. These fared even worse than the original cheap rubber and cardboard was not easy to

get hold of. I found the sand-shoes far too wide for my narrow feet so preferred to go barefoot instead. This was fine in the summer as soon as the soles of my feet became toughened, but I can't say that I enjoyed splashing through rain and mud on a cold and wet day. It took me years to become accustomed to wearing shoes again after the war, especially when imported shoes were unobtainable in Australia.

Many women favoured wooden sandals made in the camp. They were merely two pieces of wood made roughly in the shape of a foot and kept on with string or canvas strips held by nails. The uppers were never as strong as the unyielding soles and would break at awkward moments, and the wearer would be forced to walk home barefoot. Some of the men managed to get hold of soles made from old motor tyres. These proved the hardest and most comfortable and lasted for years, but their expense and scarcity limited their use to the favoured few.

It was not clothing alone which could not be replaced. Everyday essentials like soap, toothpaste and even toilet paper were at a premium. The Welfare made an occasional issue of toilet paper and cotton wool, but the women were especially hard hit through a lack of sanitary towels. There would be an occasional issue of cigarettes from the Japanese – doubtless paid for with the money sent by the British government – and when anyone lit one, he would be stopped at least a dozen times to give a light to others. The canteen offered a few essentials, mainly things made in Hong Kong, but the costs were so high that most people preferred to spend what little money they had on food.

We used commodities sparingly and learnt not to worry because, as a need arose, it would be met by some ingenious solution. Engineers and scientists were well represented, as were practical people. They used their brains to our advantage. Apart from food and clothing, soap was perhaps our greatest and most pressing need. As a substitute, they gave us lye, a liquid made from woodash, of which there was a plentiful supply. All we had to do was to take a bottle up to the kitchen and we could have as much as we needed. Lye produces no lather but we found it to be very effective. Dishes especially were washed clean without the aid of hot water (admittedly there was no fat in our diet) and clothing came out, not actually sparkling, but without a trace of grime or dirt after having been soaked and washed in the solution. As a shampoo for hair I found it

very serviceable, but many refused to use anything but toilet soap for their personal needs. How many cakes they brought in with them I am unable to estimate, but Ethel Byrne next door, for instance, managed to extend her supply until the end of our internment. I naturally used lye when my hands were dirty, but washed with cold water alone at night and never felt anything but clean. Cold showers were undoubtedly indulged in in the modern bathrooms of the main blocks and even at St Stephen's, but we in the Indian Quarters had to be content with sponging in small bowls.

The mention of Ethel's soap brings to mind an incident which demonstrates its high value at the time. It must have happened around the end of November 1944 because we had not long suffered water restrictions, the announcement of which had come as a bombshell. We were to be deprived of mains water.

The reason for this was quite incomprehensible. News had infiltrated regularly over the years of the mass migration of inhabitants from Hong Kong into 'free' China. Many had found conditions under Japanese rule intolerable and this, together with the growing food shortage, had accelerated their departure. Although permission for movement had still to be obtained, this was a mere formality. The time was to come when the authorities were glad to see them go.

By 1944 it was said that human meat was being sold openly in the markets and innocent people, accused of being homeless or destitute, were rounded up from the streets and taken to nearby islands where they were abandoned to die of exposure or starvation. From the cemetery in camp we had certainly seen open boatloads pass and I can still recall the sight and odour of dead bodies, said to have been of the sick or dying who had been pushed overboard, decaying on the beach below. It was days before they were disposed of. By 1945 Hong Kong's population had fallen from a prewar figure of over one and a half million to six hundred thousand.

In view of this and of the fact that there had been normal rainfall during the previous season, we knew that there could have been no shortage of water. In fact, we had remarked many times with thankfulness on our good fortune – water was the one thing of which we could never be deprived. How wrong we were. The Japanese told us that because of the coal shortage water could no longer be pumped up to the filter beds for distribution. It was pointed out to them that the camp was on a lower level than the reservoir and water could be

supplied by the simple process of gravitation – but the suggestion did not appeal. Since the town would be forced to do without, we must suffer the same fate. Water would be turned on for four hours every *fifth* day. There was nothing we could do except put up with it.

So severe a restriction would have been bad enough under normal circumstances but, when a lack of storage facilities was added to our other difficulties, it was a calamity indeed. In the overcrowded camp conditions sewerage presented the gravest problem. Open latrines were proposed by the Japanese authorities but after a good deal of persuasion the use of sea water was permitted. Entrances to the beaches were opened at 10 a.m. for one hour to enable the lavatories to be flushed, scrubbed and their tanks refilled for a second flush at night – and we had to be thankful for this concession.

Electricity had already been suspended for the same reason and, without power for lighting, darkness prevailed from about 6.30 each evening as we approached the winter solstice. One night I happened to be on my way to the bathroom before going to bed when I bumped into Ethel, who was about to have her nightly wash. The Faids and I always used the kitchen because it had a stone bench on which we could rest our bowl of precious water, but the others preferred the bathroom. Ethel very kindly offered to let me have first use of the room as she knew that I would not be long. As I placed my foot on one of the concrete steps on either side of the lavatory bowl, I kicked against something and, before I knew what had happened, a clatter of china and Ethel's anguished scream broke through the silent night air. She had placed her soap on the step.

I groped around in the darkness, but although I came across bits of the container the soap itself was nowhere to be found. I had no choice but to fish for it in the lavatory bowl. Normally this would have meant no great hardship because we made it a habit to scrub the toilet each day but, due to the water restrictions, the bowl had not been flushed since morning – it was a job I did not relish. I found the soap but not without difficulty. It was slippery and the bowl was full. Perhaps it was just imagination, but for days afterwards I thought I could still detect the unpleasant odour on my hand. It was an unsavoury task, but Ethel was happy to have her precious soap restored to her.

Some of the internees used dried cuttle-fish bone which they

picked up from the beaches and ground as tooth powder, but we always preferred the dry woodash from the kitchen which we put through a fine lawn handkerchief reserved specifically for this purpose. Others refused both and their teeth became stained and ugly as a consequence. Dentists since the war have remarked on the thinness of the enamel on my teeth but, except for the two extractions I had in the camp – one of them certainly because of a lack of materials for conservative dentistry – I still have my own teeth.

Free cigarettes were rarely issued and many gave up the habit. A packet sold could purchase an egg or a full slab of brown sugar, although there were always smokers who preferred to do without food. They claimed that a meal which did not satisfy only made them feel hungrier, whereas a cigarette would act as an antidote to their craving for food. All butts were saved, even those discarded by other people, and normally respected citizens or former senior government officers would think nothing of stooping to pick up a butt from the roadside in camp. Tobacco salvaged from the ends, even when mixed with dried sweet potato leaves and rolled in toilet paper, made quite a decent cigarette. Pipe smokers used pine-needles which I was told was very pleasant, but competition from the pine-needle tea-drinkers stripped the few pine trees, and excessive heat generated by this substitute tobacco caused the briar to crack, forcing them to use chrysanthemum or sweet potato leaves instead. Billy must have used pine-needles in Shamshuipo – or in Japan – because his pipe, which was returned to me with his will, had just such a crack.

Crockery can break at any time, but in camp breakages seemed higher. I had gone in without thought for eating utensils but, living with Faids, I shared in all they had. I think that plates lasted us to the end of our internment, but teacups became casualties all too soon. I can still recall with chagrin the last one being broken – the handle came off first and then, only a few weeks later, the cup itself went. I had the misfortune to have been responsible for both.

Neither breakage could be classed as catastrophic because, in expectation of just such a situation, we had bought three bowls (which were much cheaper) from the canteen. Bill and I were already using bowls, but Jeanne didn't like them because they had no handle and she could not hold a bowl when it was filled with hot tea.

We saved every scrap of paper and all empty tins – I still do. One never knew when they might come in useful. Handles could be



soldered on to jam tins quite easily and many used them for drinking cups. I once had a two-pound coffee tin. The Russians had sent me American coffee in an early parcel. The tin itself was air-tight and ant-proof and we used it for sugar until the sugar came to an end. It had been standing on the top shelf in our room for many months with nothing in it when I gave it to Mr Stark.

‘Starky’, as we called him, had been our neighbour on the Peak and was a very likable person. He lived in a flat below ours and was a fresh-air fiend. He swam everyday the beach was open and kept his bed in a corner of their balcony whatever the weather. He used a square biscuit tin for everything, from cooking extras – he always seemed to have something to cook – to collecting his food. It was black with smoke from his chatty (a portable cooker) which he must have bought from the Indians. He ate out of the same tin, sitting on his bed with it balanced on his knees. As I passed him daily carrying Jeanne’s fancy food-carrier, he would look enviously at it and wave his tin at me – he was one of the most cheerful men in the camp. I felt so ashamed that one day I mentioned to Bill and Jeanne that I thought his need of our coffee tin was greater than ours and, since we were not using it and were not likely to get any more sugar, I felt that we should let him have it. Starky was delighted. He had a piece of galvanised iron wire put over the top as a handle and then told me that he had as good a carrier as I had. He didn’t use it for cooking though – it was too precious.

Starky was not short of money and several times offered to pay us for the tin, which naturally we refused to let him do. But he never forgot what he always referred to as my ‘kindness’. And long afterwards, when without warning they sent in his wife’s trunk full of her clothing, he asked me to take my pick of anything – furs included. Mrs Stark was in Australia and her trunk had been left at the Dairy Farm in cold storage until a shortage of coal cut their electricity supply. I really felt that I had sufficient clothing to get on with but, at his insistence, I accepted a pair of white kid gloves which he said I should use for gardening. My hands, having had no protection whatsoever, were in a dreadful state.

I have dwelt at some length on our everyday shortages probably because they meant so much to us at the time, but the practical achievements and mechanical devices brought about by the ingenuity and skill of our scientists and engineers must not be overlooked.

One of our first difficulties had been with the buildings. Because of war damage, many had to be repaired before they could be occupied. It soon became evident that we were to be left entirely to our own resources; no labour or materials would be supplied from outside the camp. In the absence of brick and cement, red clay from the soil was used extensively. Progress was slow but the repairs were effected. After this, attention was turned to improving our living conditions. The large, make-do communal kitchens were furnished with ovens and fireplaces. It had been found that rice, to which a little sugar and water had been added, made a good yeast so that, when the ovens were ready, we were served rice loaves which at least looked like bread. They were neither as good nor as sustaining as those baked from wheat flour, but it gave us a change from boiled rice – and when bulk flour came with other Red Cross supplies, the ovens were ready for baking real bread.

When hot-water services in the main blocks were disconnected, their storage containers were removed and turned into pressure cookers and installed in the various communal kitchens to help relieve the shortage of firewood. A sterilizer for surgical dressings and instruments ensured aseptic conditions for operations performed in the hospital. The copper pipes were taken out and reconnected to provide running water for the cemetery and the communal gardens – that is, until water restrictions came into effect. A blacksmith's workshop turned out tools of high quality – hammers and cold chisels for special jobs, and surgical scissors and forceps for the operating-theatre and clinics. Grinders were constructed to turn large quantities of rice into flour and giant mincers were built to mince the tough meat of water buffalo as well as the skin, and the peel and seeds of pumpkin, marrow and other vegetables, so that all could go into the daily stew and nothing would be wasted. A seam of china clay (kaolin) was discovered. This replaced alkali scrapings from the walls for the treatment of mild stomach disorders and, when kitchen walls became smoky or mildewed, there was enough to give them a fresh coating of whitewash. Tar or pitch was a valuable commodity of which road surfaces were a supply. At the risk of getting our faces slapped, or of being taken into custody, we prised pieces from off the main road, hid them from the authorities, and melted them as required to repair leakages in anything from watering cans to roofs. When all parquet flooring in the main blocks was taken up to be burnt as firewood, the

bitumen which sealed the pieces to the concrete was patiently scraped off and stored for its many uses.

Although many of our essential requirements were in time supplied by Dr Selwyn-Clarke or the Red Cross, the fundamental art of calmly meeting new situations, and of adapting ourselves to them, remained our own initiative. When commodities were exhausted it was a case of trying to find substitutes, or of learning to do without. The naturally ingenious and skilful had ample opportunity to develop latent talents. They succeeded not only in serving the community but in smoothing out the wrinkles in their own lives. Others contributed of their time and labour towards the same goal. Everything became a community effort. A few who could not, or would not, adapt simply died.

It was as well that we did not know of the shortages we would have to suffer in the future nor of how long our internment would last. Strength seemed to grow from within us as we faced each new problem and, firm in our conviction that it would somehow be solved, we found a faith that fortified our resilience and lent support to our fortitude. There is an old saying in China that heaven never drives a man to desperation.

It would only be fair to add, however, that desperate as our plight seemed to be at the time we found when the war was over that many other camps had suffered hardships and privations far greater than ours. The large numbers who succumbed to malnutrition and disease in Shamshuipo, Hainan and Changi, to name a few of the POW camps, and the pitiful state of many of those who managed to survive, made light of our situation. Above all, the poignant stories told by returning prisoners from Japan showed how relatively fortunate we in Stanley had been.

---

<sup>1</sup>Nolan, L., *Small Man of Nanatake* (New York, Dutton & Co, Inc., 1966).

## ***Chapter Eight***

We had not long been in the camp before it was realized that something would have to be done for the two hundred-odd children of school age thrown together in so harsh an environment. The sheer struggle for existence and the overcrowded conditions soon began to tell on their young and impressionable minds. Parents were only too anxious to push them out of the rooms – their very presence irritated the other occupants – and, feeling insecure and unwanted, the children wandered around making greater nuisances of themselves.

They soon grew tired of playing games, and the adults were too pre-occupied with their own problems to bother about arranging organized sport for them. Moreover, the inadequate diet allowed little energy for physical activity and open space became more and more restricted as small vegetable patches sprang up everywhere. All that concerned the average person were ways and means to supplement the meagre rations. Left to their own devices, the children turned on one another.

Worse still, they were quick to observe and imitate the more undesirable elements of adult behaviour which arose from problems of daily living, particularly the constant grabbing and petty thieving so rife in the early days. Few had any scruples. Nothing could be left unguarded – even a blanket was stolen from a sleeping infant when its mother left it alone for a few minutes. One day I saw something glint in the sunlight. When I picked it up, I found it was a gold Rolex watch. I was all for leaving it in the care of the Colonial Secretariat (this was merely one of the rooms in the Married Quarters which the CS and his staff used as an office), but Bill Faid suggested that I post a couple of notices instead. Three weeks slipped by before the watch was claimed. The owner, Mr F.C. Barry, Managing Director of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels, said he thought that anyone finding a gold watch would never dream of returning it so he did not even bother to look at the notice boards.

Should a child manage to steal something and bring it home, his booty could be made a topic of conversation, even in his presence, and this encouraged him to greater effort. It is not surprising, therefore, that unoccupied and undisciplined the children developed a sharpness and cunning far beyond their years.

Just as our shortages were solved by the inventive skill of experts in their related fields, so were our problems affecting the young taken care of by those qualified to plan for their welfare. As soon as the Professor of Education and headmistresses of two leading schools accepted the responsibility for organizing a teaching programme, children of all age groups were catered for in an amazingly short period of time.

A kindergarten was set up in the Prison Officers' Club and, as the canteen opened only once weekly, there was no clash of interest. Junior school occupied the main hall of St Stephen's College in the mornings, while boys and girls of secondary-school level attended in the afternoons. There was no shortage of teachers and willing helpers – most people were glad of something to do. There were no classrooms, however, and all classes of the same age group had to be accommodated simultaneously in the one hall. They had no desks or even chairs and, until the Red Cross was able to supply a number from one of the schools in the city, the children had their lessons sitting or sprawled on straw mats laid on the floor.

Although the Japanese were strangely fond of children, they refused to provide anything towards the establishment of a school. There were no books or other equipment and, because of the shortage of paper and pencils, the style of handwriting learnt in camp became cramped and illegible. In spite of all this, the children developed a keen intellect and a rapid understanding of anything they were taught.

No one will dispute that it was anything but an outstanding achievement – results certainly reflect great credit on those who gave so much of their time and energy to seeing it through. For some of the older children the education they received in Stanley proved to be the only schooling they were to have from the beginning of the Pacific war because, when it was all over, they had to seek employment in a competitive postwar world. Others reached matriculation level. I remember quite well the trouble I had in trying to produce extra copies of seven-figure logarithm tables needed for the class in mathematics. My ignorance of this subject and my flagging power of

concentration made the typing of multinumeral figures doubly difficult – it was some time before I realized that they progressed in regular sequence. However, it was pleasing for all concerned to note in later years that results of the matriculation examinations conducted in camp were recognized by the University of London as being of sufficiently high standard. Some of the candidates were accepted without further examination into universities of the United Kingdom and elsewhere. In this connection, I might mention that question papers for the last examination were typed on Chinese toilet paper which came in large sheets. This was a commodity we could ill afford to spare, but fortunately the paper could still be used for its rightful purpose after the examination. After the first two years our supply of typing paper was exhausted and that was the best substitute the Registrar could provide. It was a concession also to be allowed to type the question papers in my own room in the Indian Quarters instead of behind the locked doors of the University examination room. We had only the one small table and, when this was in use, I typed sitting on my bed with the machine on my knees. Until the Registrar collected the papers a few minutes before the actual examination, I sat on them by day and slept on them at night.

Parents will ever be grateful for all that was given to their children. The youngsters themselves certainly suffered little from any shortage they might have had. Mabel's sons, for instance, have done extremely well. They went on to school in Sydney, where Michael subsequently gained a doctoral degree in aeronautical engineering in the University of Sydney. He has for many years been with the Royal Aircraft establishment in Farnborough, England. Peter, who qualified as a chartered accountant in Liverpool, England, is now company secretary of Hongkong Land, the largest land investment company in Hong Kong. And Sheila, her youngest, is a keen worker for the UN human rights movement in Asia and a regular contributor to their newsletter on refugee settlement problems in Hong Kong.

Engrossed as we were in the pursuit of food, mental stimulation was yet found to be of prime importance. Undoubtedly those who kept themselves alert and active achieved a satisfactory degree of physical and mental stability, whilst others who occupied their time with bemoaning their fate suffered a rapid decline. Many wished to use their enforced inactivity to advance their knowledge. For those, complete courses in adult education were planned and made avail-

able, although short courses proved the more popular and many series of lectures were given regularly and repeated many times.

With so many academic people available, subjects covered a wide range. There were informal classes in engineering, mathematics, economics, psychology, languages, history, English literature and others. These were held mostly in the early afternoon, in any corner of the camp where a group could sit and listen and hold discussions undisturbed. I attended classes in Mandarin held twice weekly in the open garage which served as a depot for the ration lorry in the mornings. The lecturer was Commissioner of the Chinese Maritime Customs and normally lived in Peking, where he had spent many years. He spoke the language fluently and knew more characters than many Chinese did. He managed to acquire a blackboard on which he wrote copious notes. Paper being at a premium, most people used the small pieces which they salvaged carefully from cigarette packages as notepaper. I was fortunate enough to have a sizable wad of lined foolscap sheets. These were covered with Chinese characters and phrases, with their phonetic sounds in English and explanatory notes in my best Pitman's shorthand. For class tests I used cigarette-package paper. For many years the collection, which included gardening notes, maps and other records, remained one of my most treasured souvenirs of Stanley, but it has since been donated to the archives section of the University of Hong Kong.

For those who enjoyed reading there was a good collection of books. The entire contents of the American Club library had been sent in early in our internment and, when they were repatriated, the Americans bequeathed the collection to the camp. There were also contributions from private persons and clubs. The Vice-Chancellor donated his collection of classical literature and a recent edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. It is said that many people read more books during their years of internment than ever before or since.

In the same way as the Sino-Japanese conflict united nationalist and communist forces in a common struggle in China, so our continual fight for existence brought together many religious denominations in the camp. The churches were well represented – I remember seeing a list somewhere which named over twenty denominations. Besides the larger ones, there seemed to have been about three different branches of Presbyterians (Irish, American and New Zealand), as well as the Society of Friends, Lutherans, Seventh Day Adventists, Salvation Armyists and others. I think that the Roman Catholics

and the Christian Scientists kept strictly to their own disciplines but, by the first Easter, most of the others had joined together – if not entirely in principle, at least in worship. Easter Sunday was celebrated by a large congregation attending a combined service on the football field in the Indian Quarters conducted by ministers of ‘the United Churches’. In a world so torn by strife it was an ennobling experience to see so many united in prayer.

Although I was not a regular churchgoer and, indeed, was not at that time even baptized, I was one of the congregation. Billy and I had always taken the children to church at Christmas and at Easter and, although we were separated, I wished to observe the practice so that in a spiritual sense, at least, we would be reunited.

As a child I had had a mixed religious upbringing. My mother was a devout Buddhist and, in and around the Buddhist doctrines had been wound a myriad of local customs, beliefs and superstitions advanced by our amahs and other domestics. To this had been added a liberal dose of Confucian philosophy gained through an early introduction to the Chinese classics. Most impressions, however, had been swept aside by the intensive religious instruction of an Anglican missionary institution.

Long before I left the sheltered walls of the Diocesan Girls’ School I had become a ready and serious convert – but this was my own secret. Mother, I knew, would never agree to any change of religion. She would have regarded it as an unforgivable breach of faith for, even though she sent us to a missionary school, it never occurred to her that we could have been influenced by Christian teaching. Devout Buddhist that she was, she never achieved sufficient sublimity to tolerate anything but blind faith (that is, *her* faith) on the part of her children. Meanwhile two things happened to shake my own firm conviction.

The first was a display of bigotry on the part of Billy’s church minister at the time of our wedding. Billy’s parents were staunch Anglicans but, to please my mother, we had decided on a civil rather than a religious ceremony. At the same time, Billy wanted some form of religious observance and asked his minister if he could go over the marriage service with us – a reasonable enough request, though it was refused because I was not a baptized Christian. The second incident happened soon after my mother’s death. The minister of the church at Kowloon Tong called with a family friend to offer condolence. Before they had been with me five minutes, the



suggestion had been made that, as my mother was no longer living, I could become baptized.

By Easter 1942, even though my husband and our children were Anglicans and I was, at heart, entirely converted to the Christian faith, it was not until I attended the service of the United Churches that I finally arranged to be baptized. Even now I do not know what it was that influenced my sudden decision, though I told myself at the time that it was because I wanted to offer thanksgiving to the Divine Power that had brought Billy through the war unscathed.

## ***Chapter Nine***

Although Tweed Bay Hospital had been established immediately on our arrival, it soon became apparent that the camp needed an extended health service. Clinics were the first to be introduced. Manned by volunteer doctors and nurses, they functioned at fixed hours to dispense extras like powdered milk, dried eggs and vitamins, and even bread when available, to invalids and babies within the area of their control. The very fact of their being on hand to give advice, treat minor ailments and injuries, and attend to the one hundred and one matters so essential to the general welfare of a large community of assorted age groups made them quite invaluable. The overburdened staffs of the hospital were grateful for the relief they offered and many internees were spared the long tiring trek to outpatients.

As a direct result of the poor diet, dental caries developed rapidly, particularly among the young and, as soon as the DMS could send in the required equipment, dental services were instituted. The government dental surgeon, Dr J. Lanchester, and an experienced dental mechanic, Mr Sammy Shields, set up surgeries in the Married Quarters. But materials ran out all too quickly so that little conservative dentistry could be practised. Indeed, extractions – though never indiscriminate – were more or less the standard treatment. I remember going to Dr Lanchester with a diffused but nonetheless agonizing pain on one side of my face. After the third visit, at which he maintained that he could do nothing for me, I burst into tears. I felt that he thought I was making a fuss over nothing. He assured me, however, that he knew I had an abscess and that it was very painful but, without the help of an X-ray machine, he was unable to isolate the area of infection, and he simply refused to extract every tooth from my jaw, which is what he would have to do unless I waited.

I have every reason to be grateful for his firm stand. After another two days and much tapping with his hammer he found the

cause of the trouble and a simple extraction put an end to my suffering.

Meanwhile, as soon as the cold winds of winter gave way to warmer conditions in 1942 the possible onset of common tropical diseases engaged the attention of our doctors. The abnormally high concentration, in a confined area, of inhabitants with a lowered resistance brought about by poor diet and exposure would have given sufficient cause for anxiety under any circumstance but, when to these conditions was added a lack of drugs to combat infection, the danger of epidemics became very real. Antibiotics were not yet in use but the DMS had, in his preparation for hostilities, built up huge stocks of sulphur drugs which the Japanese authorities had confiscated. I distinctly remember them taking over the supply from the University hospital, saying that they would send it in to us. This, of course, never eventuated. The Japanese were themselves highly susceptible to infection and, although they cared little for our nutritional problems, they were only too conscious of the possibility of disease spreading in the camp.

They often wore masks if they had occasion to come near our hospital and, throughout the years, they insisted that we should have regular inoculations against diphtheria, cholera and typhoid. Many regarded the practice as unnecessary torture – most of us were in no condition to stand the added strain of immune reaction as a result of inoculation but, as things were, it was perhaps as well we had no choice.

Dysentery appeared with the first approach of summer, just as we heard that diphtheria had assumed epidemic proportions and resulted in some deaths in Shamshuipo Camp but, although we saw a few cases of both, neither became a real problem in Stanley. Malaria, however, was not uncommon. The physical terrain of the surrounding country provided excellent conditions for the formation of stream rock-pools and seepages after the summer rains. They offered ideal breeding places for the anopheles mosquito which carries the malarial parasite. In normal times, frequent inspection and rigid control were carried out. It was not surprising, therefore, that, with the enforced suspension of this health service and a lack of mosquito nets at night, many suffered from malaria. The surprise was that there was not a higher incidence of the disease. But for the vigilance adopted within the camp it would certainly have been much worse.

The practice of getting out on the hillside to escape the overcrowding gave rise to several instances of scrub typhus. This disease, carried by the bush mite, is not normally endemic in Hong Kong. Although there was no question of spread at any time, some of the cases proved fatal. On the other hand, our years in Stanley were marked by a total absence of cholera and only an isolated case or two of typhoid. Considering the fact that drinking water, about which we were normally so careful, was neither chlorinated, filtered nor boiled, this was a remarkable achievement. It is certain that we were saved by our complete segregation in an area exposed only to fresh sea air and our strict adherence to simple rules of hygiene and sanitation. Scrupulous cleanliness in the kitchens, close attention to drains and sewers, and meticulous care taken in the collection and disposal of refuse were some of the community responsibilities carried out by volunteers. Most internees endeavoured to keep their living quarters spotless. Inevitably and unfortunately, there lived amongst us the odd person who did not bother but he or she stood out as the exception rather than the rule. A friend told me that when he was a patient in hospital for twelve weeks the two who shared his room did not even once sweep the floor. One of them, in fact, contracted typhus, though he was fortunate enough to recover.

Even though there were no epidemics of an alarming nature, the health of the camp was a disgrace to Japan. Our diet was the main trouble. Although the importance of calorific value in food had long given way to a newer consciousness of its vitamin content, it was still a fundamental principle that a certain minimum number of calories was necessary for the maintenance of life. A conservative figure seems to have been in the region of 1,600 units for a person at complete rest in bed. A sedentary worker is said to require 2,400 and, for someone of moderate activity, 3,000 units are needed. According to our dieticians, the food in the camp gave only 1,400 calories in the early and comparatively better days. It climbed to a peak of 2,200 when bulk flour came with the first consignment of Red Cross supplies. As time wore on and the diet deteriorated, the figure sank gradually until, by January 1945, the count barely registered 1,300. By then our systems must have grown accustomed to the shortage. We just managed to survive.

As far as vitamins are concerned, authoritative sources maintain that the body is able to store reserves of vitamin B<sub>1</sub> for only short periods of time, at most three months. Early signs had appeared in

February but, in support of this theory, a sudden increase in specifically identifiable cases of beriberi by the end of March 1942 gave rise to growing concern. Rice was said to have been the main culprit. Because of its high carbohydrate content, ingestion of polished rice in large quantities, without the vitamins normally found in whole cereals, yeast, peas, beans and other vegetables, and meat and fat soon gives rise to this disease. It is a common complaint among poor people in rice-eating countries – the term beriberi is derived from a Sinhalese word meaning extreme weakness. Country people in China refer to it as ‘vapour’ in the legs. In the case of internees who were accustomed to a balanced diet of bread, meat and vegetables, the effect was dramatic.

The disease manifests itself in various forms. The most common was wet beriberi; the accumulation of fluid in body tissues near the legs results in swollen ankles. In severe cases, cardiac function is affected causing generalized swelling, and heart failure may lead to sudden death unless therapy is vigorously begun and maintained. In the dry type there is symmetrical ascending neuritis. In early stages, this causes weakness in the muscles of the legs which leads to difficulty in walking. Later there is involvement of the arms, and fingers lose their power of gripping. As the disease progresses, severe pain is experienced and may be brought on by minor stimuli, such as the weight of a sheet on a bedridden patient. A third form, infantile beriberi, occurs in the first few months of life. It is associated with active or latent beriberi in the nursing mother and the outcome is fatal unless actively treated. As far as I know this was not identified in the camp. Few babies were born in the camp in the later years when the disease was so prevalent.

Although the men with beriberi mainly lost weight, the women tended to become bloated. They suffered severe hormonal dysfunction resulting in either a cessation of menstruation or in excessive blood loss. Loss of knee-jerk was common and all moved with difficulty, dragging their feet. Severity rose and fell rapidly as a result of treatment or its withdrawal, as well as with improvement or deterioration of our diet. The condition seemed to be worse in hot and humid weather, as is shown by the rising numbers seen during the summer when Hong Kong’s relative humidity normally reaches well over ninety per cent. Different people were affected in different ways and to varying extents, but hardly anyone escaped. I had the dry form in camp, though not acutely, and, strangely

enough, I seem to have carried a legacy of wet beriberi because, ever since internment, even on a normal diet with added vitamin capsules, my ankles never fail to swell each summer when Melbourne's heat and humidity rise.

While doctors and dietitians experimented with variations in the dosage and frequency of thiamine (a synthetic vitamin B<sub>1</sub> which Dr Selwyn-Clarke was able to procure at great cost) other strange manifestations appeared. The dreaded pellagra, with its sore mouths and swollen tongues, was identified with a lack of vitamin B<sub>2</sub>. Septic sores developed and failed to heal, and central blindness, said to be associated with vitamin A deficiency, claimed its share of victims. Bran and beans replaced thiamine when the supply came to an end – they were actually found to be more effective – and a locally produced yeast kept pellagra at bay. Peanut butter proved an excellent deterrent against defective vision, and shark-liver oil provided a good source of vitamin A.

Nutritional disorders were by far our greatest problem, but there were in addition the usual common complaints such as intestinal disorders, peptic ulcers, heart and kidney disease, rheumatic fever and dengue, to mention a few. Tuberculosis lurks ever around the corner in Hong Kong. There had always been a high incidence particularly in the poorer sections of the community, where overcrowding and poor diet produced a situation conducive to spread. The tubercle bacillus is indiscriminate, however, and, wherever it chooses to settle, a lowered resistance on the part of the host, especially during humid weather, means it soon takes hold. Dormant scars became active among the elderly in Stanley and new victims added their toll. Some of the more active cases were kept in isolation in the Leprosarium, but most patients were taken care of in the hospital wards. In July 1944, with a persistent cough and a weight of under six stone, I was readmitted into Tweed Bay Hospital for observation for tuberculosis. Antibiotic therapy has controlled the disease in recent years, but at the time rest was really the only treatment available. Milk deliveries had long been suspended but soybean milk (ground from the raw bean), although less palatable, made an excellent substitute as far as food value was concerned. Patients received a daily ration of about six ounces.

I had a history of a minor chest breakdown in 1933 (it was for this reason that Selwyn had been so concerned about my health) but, with the then new artificial pneumothorax treatment, I had been

declared free of infection. Since then I had kept remarkably well. I am not a naturally stout person but the strain of the war, followed by the privations in camp, had taken off any fat I might have had. Moreover, by mid-1944 we had a fair-sized vegetable garden and, although Bill Faid did not in any way spare himself, I contributed my share of the physical labour involved.

We had, in addition, a couple of emotional upsets. In May of that year the Byrnes, one of the two couples living in the other room of our flat, received news in one of those rare letters from the outside of the death of their son. We were naturally closely associated for, besides being neighbours, George Byrne, who was Professor of Chemistry, had been Bill's colleague for twenty years. Their only child on graduation from Cambridge had been commissioned and had been killed in action in Burma. The parents were devastated. George had not been able to accept internment with equanimity. He would often say that he would never live to see Brian again. On the first day of June he suffered a coronary occlusion.

George Byrne's death was a terrible shock for Ethel, as indeed it was for all of us. We were her closest friends in the camp and she was inconsolable. I myself couldn't rid the thought of George from my mind and seemed to meet him in the flat at every turn – perhaps this was due to the suddenness of his death. George's body was carried to its resting place in the bottomless box which was used as a communal coffin. After the usual simple service, the 'coffin' was lifted and the body, which had been sewn in hessian, was re-lowered.

I remember getting a bad cold soon after George Byrne's death which developed into a chest cough I could not throw off. Dr Kirk, a family friend, met me one day when I had a bout of severe coughing. He told me I should be in hospital.

I didn't like the idea. I knew somehow that it was exhaustion rather than a recurrence of tuberculosis that made me feel so ill – sheer willpower had kept me on my feet. I talked it over with Bill, confessing that I was afraid that once I went to bed I would give up the struggle. Bill said, however, that was all the more reason why I should go and told me not to worry about the garden, he would manage until I came back.

The thought crossed my mind that I might never come back, but I nevertheless accepted Dr Kirk's advice and, as soon as a bed became available, I was admitted into hospital for observation. Being a

mobile patient, I was allowed the next day to get dressed and sit on the grass outside. The Faids joined me after their evening meal and we watched the reflected glow of the sunset until approaching curfew sent them home.

I felt strangely fatigued as I climbed the hospital stairs. My feet dragged and I turned towards the ward with an unsteadiness which made things seem unreal. I dropped on my bed fully clothed. When everyone went out on the balcony to admire the lovely moon, I tried to rouse myself sufficiently to join them, but it was no good: all I could do was to lie still.

As it turned out, the rest was long overdue. Once the demand for willpower was ended, exhaustion gained the upper hand. When at last I summoned enough strength to prepare for bed, I collapsed, then lost consciousness. The authorities were naturally concerned and gave me every test which their limited facilities would allow, but investigations showed no functional disorder. As a precaution I was confined to bed.

I recovered very slowly, but time was of no consequence and it was pleasant to be made a fuss of and to have friends at my bedside. The Faids and Mabel came daily, others visited when they could. Except for the diet which, apart from the soybean milk, lacked nourishment, I could have been a patient in any sanatorium in Hong Kong.

Kenelm H. Digby, Professor of the Ho Tung Chair of Clinical Surgery, had known me as a child. He operated in Stanley twice weekly, as he did at the University's teaching hospital, and had undergone an emergency operation himself for a perforated appendix. He often stopped by during a ward round to have a word with me. One day he noticed that I had an infected sebaceous cyst on my cheek. He said it needed surgery but he, for one, would be unwilling to take on so delicate a facial operation under camp conditions.

I felt disappointed but realized that, with the acute shortage of anaesthesia and the danger of septicaemia, his hesitation was understandable. He promised nevertheless to keep an eye on it and, one morning, he told me he had decided to operate on the following day. Then one of those terrible tragedies happened.

Even after a lapse of over thirty years I am still unable to think of that day without feeling again a sense of desolation. It was Sunday, 23 July 1944. The church service was to be held in our ward and I was



asked to choose the hymn. Without hesitation I suggested my favourite, 'Abide with me'. Immediately after the service, Sister Gordon took me out on the balcony and quietly told me that Bill Faid had slipped from our roof and, having fractured his skull, was dead on arrival at the hospital.

I found out later that he had been repairing a leak on the roof. We had done this many times before, using an old kerosine tin to melt the pitch which we kept for this emergency. That morning he had slipped from the steps which we ourselves had constructed. They were quite safe really, but it was a wet morning and he had on rubber shoes supplied by the Welfare. Our block of flats was only two storeys high, but when he fell he had rebounded with tremendous force from the galvanized iron clotheslines stretched across outside the back balcony. He was flung upwards and outwards and fell heavily on to the concrete yard below.

Sister took me to where they had laid him. I kissed the cold face but could not weep. My thoughts were only of what his death – a death which would never have happened had we been given proper maintenance facilities – meant to us. In a place like Stanley, where morale was so essential, we could ill afford the loss of one who was so outstanding an example of courage and fortitude.

Professor Digby came to see me in the evening. He, too, felt keenly the loss of a friend and colleague. He told me he would not consider adding physical trauma to my mental distress. He had decided to postpone the operation.

By Wednesday morning the cyst was near to bursting and, as soon as Professor Digby put his knife into me, it did. A local anaesthetic was used instead of ether because, as the cyst was on my face, he could not easily work with a mask in the way. Unfortunately, in spite of several injections the anaesthetic failed to produce the desired effect and I felt the pain of every cut and probe. The Professor spoke to me all the time, encouraging me and telling me how brave and what a good patient he thought I was. He assured me that he would be careful to leave as neat a scar as possible. He spent over two hours, a long time compared to the usual 20-30 minutes taken for similar operations. Not only did he manage to avoid touching any facial nerve, but my scar is scarcely noticeable today, although at the time he said he was not completely satisfied with the result.

I was in hospital for six weeks and managed to regain only a few

pounds of my lost weight, but I felt a good deal stronger and returned sadly to my duties in the Indian Quarters to resume life as an internee. Jeanne and I asked Ethel Byrne to join our mess and, in our assumed cheerfulness, we became known to our friends as the 'merry widows'. I was, of course, only a grass widow at the time.

I had two further short spells in hospital, both times as a gynaecological patient of Dr Kirk. I was one whose hormonal function was so disturbed that I had to be treated for severe blood loss. By this time, we were short of ether and the supply of electricity had been cut. Water was strictly rationed. Most people would shrink from the idea of a cold water enema, but that was the least of our hardships. We were only grateful that sufficient water could be spared for this pre-operative treatment, even if the shock reduced the patient to a state of collapse.

Drugs too were in very short supply. I remember Professor Digby coming to see me in the Indian Quarters one day about Mabel's son Michael. The lad was on the dangerously ill list with a deep-seated abscess in his nasal-pharyngeal region caused by an infection caught from handling a spent bullet which he found. In his lowered state of health, his natural defences had offered little resistance. The Professor was to operate on him the following day and said he would be happier about the operation if only he could give Michael some form of sulphonamide before. He went on to say that they actually had a small supply in the hospital but, unless the patient had little chance of recovery, they wouldn't part with it.

I put the problem to a friend in the police force. He produced sufficient sulphanilamide tablets for a full course of treatment and, when Michael successfully came through the operation, he brought a few eggs to hasten the child's recovery. With sulphur drugs unobtainable for either love or money, and eggs the price they were, I can only say that I was deeply in the police-officer's debt – but such were the friendships formed in Stanley.

## ***Chapter Ten***

I am frequently asked what we did with ourselves all day. Strangely enough, we seemed to have little spare time. There must have been days, naturally, when we didn't know where we were heading or, in the face of new difficulties, how we could ever carry on, but often in the darkest moments the instinct for survival would force a resurgence of activity to stimulate fresh interest.

The queues were a never-ending chore. In such a large community where supplies were so limited, every issue, however small, had to be distributed strictly according to quantity and number. Each claim in turn was checked and rechecked to ensure that there would be enough for everyone. Even if they did nothing else, the queues served to break the tedium of the day: they were time-consuming – the canteen queue alone often lasted many hours and required several shifts.

There were seven in our flat and housework occupied a little of each day, at least for the four women. For the sake of morale, the four of us took it in turns to scrub down the back quarters daily. In addition to this, Jeanne Faid coached two teenage boys twice a week in mathematics. Michael came to me for a short Chinese lesson most mornings, which meant a pleasant half-hour break on the hillside facing the sea. His mother wanted him to retain his knowledge of Cantonese; besides, it kept us in close touch.

In the adjoining room Bobby Pegg, a trained nurse, took her turn at the clinic. Ethel Byrne was an avid reader. I can still see her returning to the flat, her face alight with pleasure, and we would know that a book she had been waiting for had turned up at the library. She would be happy for days after that. Ethel also had her weekly game of bridge.

Of the men, Peter Pegg, who was Deputy Director of Public Works in normal life, spent the morning supervising repairs to the war-damaged buildings. When we started our garden he took a hand. Bill Faid went grass-cutting three mornings a week. George Byrne

was the only one who could not fit into any activity: he was constitutionally unsuited, both physically and mentally. Much of his time was taken up with waiting for queues to begin moving.

Little jobs took a lot of time, finicky jobs like picking out weevils from flour (when we had an issue) or scanning rice for gravel and cockroach 'blacks'. Rice grain is normally clean and white, especially good quality rice but, whatever the quality supplied, our rations were usually full of gravel and dust and dirt. It was said that when the rice bags burst in transit, as they sometimes did, the sweepings would be placed into new bags and reserved for Stanley Camp. Cockroaches must have had grand feasts in the grain stores, judging by the quantity of excreta we were able to pick from the rice. This chore became progressively more tiresome and many gave up in disgust. Besides, they decided that weevils and the blacks constituted the only source of protein in our diet, but although I might have agreed in principle I could never bring myself to neglect the task. The blacks had a strong unpleasant odour even when cooked. It was strongest when ground to make rice flour for our loaves. Nothing much could be done to the large quantities cooked in the communal kitchens. A simple rice cleaning machine was invented which helped to a large extent, but mostly everything was thrown in – gravel, blacks and all. If you were fussy you could pick out the blacks from your plate and if you valued your teeth you would exercise great care while chewing your food.

Another time-consuming task of this nature was hunting bugs. Our Indian Quarters were particularly heavily infested with the pest. We never knew where they hid themselves during daylight hours, but soon learnt to our dismay that as soon as all was quiet they would emerge from hiding to feast on us.

A couple in the flat below us had papered their walls. He had been in the consular service in Canton and they had moved to Hong Kong when that city fell to the Japanese in 1938. Accustomed to better living conditions, they hadn't liked the look of their bare lime-washed walls decorated with marks of dried blood where bugs had been squashed by the previous tenants. How they acquired their wallpaper was a mystery, but their room certainly looked quite attractive. It was not long, however, before the paper began to peel in the humid sea air. The day he decided to tear down the lot was marked by loud screams from his wife: the paper had concealed large swarms of bugs, and the startled creatures, suddenly stripped

of their protective covering, moved everywhere in mad confusion.

The first bug I ever saw was on my own bed when I was still in the Married Quarters. One morning I found a flat black speck on my sheet. (It was just as well I had taken the sheets from my bed when I left the University, otherwise I might not even have seen the bug.) Even as I feared the worst, I tried not to admit it and asked my elderly roommate if she knew what it was. She picked it up, examined it carefully, squashed it between thumb and forefinger and, wrinkling her nose as she smelled it, said quite decisively: 'It's a bug. Here take a sniff.'

Sure enough it had the sickly smell of bitter almonds which, according to her, was a certain diagnosis. Horrified, I stripped the bed and rushed with it down to the Indian Quarters where Bill gave it another good scrub.

For a while I lived on in blissful ignorance. It was soon shattered. I returned from the midday queue one day to find a look of concern on Bill's face. He told me that he had sat for only a moment on the end of my bed when the crossbar fell off. As he bent to replace it, he noticed a slight movement.

'I snatched up my glasses – there, this is what I saw.' Once more he removed the crossbar. 'I couldn't believe my eyes.'

Neither could I. The crossbars at either end of the camp stretcher supported the main frame which held the canvas – they had cavities into which the frame fitted. I saw that these cavities were filled with clusters of shining black bodies, moving in angry protest at being exposed. It was an unforgettable sight. Even when I think of it today, the hairs on my forearms stand on end. At the time, I burst into tears of mortification.

As soon as lunch was over we set to work. Bill told me to strip my bed and put all my bedding in the sun to air, while he went straight to his friends in the police block and soon returned with a kerosine tin and some carbolic acid. Filling the tin half full with water, he added the powerful disinfectant and set it on the hotplate to boil. We began carefully to unhitch the canvas from the frame. Even though the bugs came as no surprise, the sight of them was horrifying: there were masses of them, each one fat with my blood – and I so anaemic. I wondered later how it was that I hadn't felt them at night, and why there was not a single mark on me, and arrived at a theory which has never been disproved (not that anyone has had the inclination to do so): one's own bugs don't leave marks, it is other people's that cause

the skin reaction. Long after my own colony was under control I would sometimes be troubled with bite marks on the backs of my knees, especially after I had been sitting on Starky's bed chatting to him. However, one became so accustomed to these things that they were mostly accepted as routine.

We plunged the canvas into the boiling water for twenty minutes. Then I took it out to the grass to dry, while Bill folded the frame and boiled first one end and then the other. One would have thought that so drastic a treatment would have wiped them out forever. Not a bit of it. I continued to make frequent inspections of my bed and, even towards the end of the last summer, would still find the occasional bug.

The first months slipped by with Bill thinning out to a skeleton because he could not swallow rice. We gave away whatever we had left over because, at that time, even Jeanne and I could not always eat our entire ration. The Colonial Veterinary Surgeon called each morning with his tin. He had been a huge man but was beginning to show signs of ankylosis of the spine, a progressive disease which over the years bent him almost double. Everyone could see that he was being slowly starved. He was never without his pipe. He used to tell me that he relied on tobacco to stave off his violent attacks of hunger – he must have been able to get a supply through the ration lorry when he made his daily inspection of the meat.

Bill often wished that we could supplement our diet with garden produce – anything to make the rice more palatable. It seemed such a waste of time and opportunity not to do so, but the idea was always discarded because of the petty thieving that went on. Nothing was ever allowed to mature – if the owner didn't harvest his crop, it would be stolen long before it was ready. One day we had a few fresh tomatoes in our ration, but the rare treat could not be fully enjoyed because the tomatoes had to be thrown into the stew. Over our cup of tea that evening I suggested that we might try growing a few bushes of the dwarf variety on the roof.

Bill thought me quite mad. 'Whoever heard of growing anything on malthoid roofing? And even if *you* could, how would you get up there in the first place?'

I told him I had a plan. The first thing to do was to get some stumpy angle iron supports from Mr Pegg. I felt sure that they could be driven into the brickwork from the corner of the back balcony and plugged with the camp's home-made cement. This would give

an access to the roof which would be ours alone.

I had studied the layout of the roof while sitting with Michael on the hillside. I pointed out that over the stairwells there were a couple of fairly deep alcoves which we could build up with bricks to form the beds. The surrounding wall would provide sufficient protection from the wind, and each bed could take four to six bushes which would give us quite a nice crop. Drainage would be no problem because excess water would seep out between the bricks, which were porous. As for soil, there was plenty of good leaf mould on the hillside which only required collecting. I pointed out that it was only June, and if we started work straightaway, we would be ready for the next sowing season in September.

‘Anything else?’ A touch of sarcasm in Bill’s voice.

‘Well, we’d have to bribe Mr Pegg with a share of the produce. He’d probably demand a half-share, but we’ll beat him down to a third. We might even make it a quarter-share. Also, what’s to be done about the Byrnes? – there’s sure to be friction there. Anyway, that’s all I can think of at the moment. It’s worth a try – we won’t have lost anything if the plan doesn’t work.’

Mr Pegg made difficulties as I knew he would, especially over the Byrnes. He could see no reason why George Byrne should enjoy the fruits of his labour. After a good deal of argument, it was agreed that any produce would be divided into five parts, of which two-fifths would go to Peggs and three-fifths to us. We sub-divided our share into five again to include shares for George and Ethel. There was never enough to fill us, but the extras were always welcome and we had the satisfaction of knowing that the Byrnes had a share in whatever we grew.

The iron supports soon appeared with no questions asked and immediately the steps were set into the brickwork. Bill and Peter Pegg began carrying buckets of soil which I helped scrape from the hillside. Bricks were collected at night and were arranged three-high across the front of the alcoves. The two beds took shape and we built two others around the chimneys. While this was going on, I persuaded the CVS to extract some seeds from the next lot of ration tomatoes when he inspected the meat. There were no means of telling what variety they were but I set them anyway, and it was not long before I had the thrill of seeing tiny green specks break through the sandy soil of my home-made seedbox.

I had been trained from childhood to take an interest in

gardening and, from a study of the volumes of a gardening encyclopaedia, had gained some valuable theoretical knowledge, but there had always been a full-time gardener to do the work which left me lacking in practical experience. It was therefore with a good deal of anxiety that I tackled the problems of growing food on which our well-being, if not our very existence, depended. When the seedlings were large enough to be handled, the beds were ready to take them and I transplanted them with the utmost care. It was late autumn and the weather was wonderfully kind. Not only did the seedlings survive, they surged ahead. We grew mint for its flavour and vitamin value in one of the chimney beds and, just as I was wondering what to put into the other, Frank Fisher came down one evening and tossed what looked like a bit of dried grass at me.

‘There you are, Jean. You pride yourself on your green fingers – just see what you can do with that.’

Frank and his colleagues had received a bunch of shallots in a parcel from town and ‘that’ was one which, try as they might, they could not use as food. It was dried and shrivelled and, instead of throwing it away, he had decided to let me have it for the garden. I welcomed the experiment and pushed it into the other bed, not expecting much of a result, but, in what seemed like no time at all, I was overjoyed to see a tender green shoot emerge. The tiny shoot grew and multiplied and grew again. A couple of bulbs fried in oil improved the flavour of rice and made all the difference to our diet. It had the added advantage of storing well. Several generations later a specially large bunch produced 128 bulbs – I know because I bribed one of the children to count them.

The roof garden was such a success that our thoughts turned to expansion. By this time the camp was more organized. Most internees had regained their sense of values and people no longer stole. Bill cleared a small patch in the bush on the other side of the pathway from the building. By the end of 1943 we had a vegetable garden in which more tomatoes as well as lettuces, carrots, peas, turnips and even celery flourished. The next summer saw a crop of local string-beans, a fast-growing and prolific climber, and runners of cucumber and pumpkin spread in profusion over the entire patch. We even grew peanuts for their high protein value and because legumes enrich the soil. Whenever we could spare anything I took it up to Mabel or to some other special friend. Not only was our diet improved by the added vitamins, but the joy of achievement more



than compensated for the effort. Above all, fruitful occupation gave meaning and purpose to our lives.

Most of the seeds, like the tomato seeds, came from the rations, and seedlings were passed from friend to friend or exchanged for food or cigarettes. Some tomato plants were said to have been grown from seeds out of a tin. I was sent a bunch of carrots in my first Christmas parcel with their tops on. I had always heard that carrot tops would grow but had never tried it; we cut the tops off and planted them with the shallots. We had carrots every season after that. I had acquired the art of seed-collecting. Furthermore, I came to appreciate the need for selectivity in deciding which ones to preserve for stock and learnt by bitter experience the importance of dry conditions for seed storage. I found, too, that nature sometimes neglected her work of pollination – cucumbers and pumpkins, especially, often needed help. It was all very pleasant and productive and the process of sorting the seeds, packaging and labelling them, filled many evenings with interest.

Watering, especially of the seedlings, presented some difficulty. Although water restrictions did not come into force until the autumn of 1944, when we started our garden all we possessed in the way of equipment was a bucket and a couple of washbowls. Bill was given the kerosine tin in which my bed had been boiled. He found a discarded rose from what must have been a toy watering can and, with the help of his friends and a soldering iron, managed to connect it to the tin with a home-made spout. Gardening equipment was non-existent. Some could be borrowed from friends in the Married Quarters or St Stephen's, but everyday tools had to be improvised as our needs arose. I remember a favourite gadget for breaking up the soil. It consisted of a small piece of wood about six inches long with half a dozen nails driven through it. Using it was a test of patience and endurance – it was a backbreaking task – but our beds always looked well tended. Things were not always easy but, with enterprise and imagination, and assistance from friends, we had all that was needed.

After the Canadians were repatriated in September 1943, and there was still no move in our direction, we resigned ourselves to a long internment. Bill decided that we would have to go in for sweet potatoes and at once began preparing the ground. Sweet potatoes grow best in raised rows; their cultivation is simple provided the soil is right. Ours was a little too heavy and required the addition of sand



to make it more friable. This was easily obtained by going down towards the beach. Sweet potatoes were grown extensively in the New Territories. The local farmers planted them in their paddy fields in the winter, when the rice season was over. The police, who were already growing them, said that all the care they needed was an occasional turning of the runners so that they didn't strike false roots. Moreover, they could be grown from cuttings. We began with six rows in a new patch adjoining the vegetables and a further ten rows were added later down by the beach. By Easter 1944 the plants were thriving in varying stages of growth. Bill forecast sweet potatoes for Christmas.

One day he came in to lunch looking dejected and sat through the meal in miserable silence. I ventured to ask if there was nothing to be done in the garden. 'I'm never going to touch it again,' he said. 'It's a waste of time.' I looked out from the balcony. All appeared

normal. I strolled down to investigate further but could see nothing out of the ordinary. After a while he joined me.

Leading the way to the adjoining beds of sweet potatoes he picked up one of the trailing runners. I saw in the perfectly healthy looking main stem a tiny speck like the puncture mark of a hyperdermic syringe. Bill told me he had been sitting puffing away contentedly at his pipe filled with his own sweet potato leaves when one of the young policemen had come along the pathway from the hospital. He had admired the garden and asked if we had the sweet potato blight.

At Bill's denial he picked up a runner. He showed Bill a mark on the main stem and, opening it with his thumbnail, exposed a fat white grub embedded within its structure. Apparently the blight was widespread; an army of female moths must have invaded the camp shedding their eggs. No garden had escaped.

Bill told me that after the lad left he put on his spectacles and examined the rest of the patch. Every single plant was punctured. He didn't have the heart to look in the other patch, he said. I must admit that I was shocked – we would have potatoes, but they would be worm-ridden and bitter to the taste.

'Look,' I said suddenly, 'if it is as widespread as he says it is, it must be a common complaint among the local farmers. Either it doesn't matter or there will be some way of tackling it. Even if the potatoes don't taste or look so good, the food value will still be there. Let's try to get rid of the grub – obviously no damage has as yet been done.'

I remembered that among my precious belongings were a very sharp scalpel and a pair of surgical scissors which had been taken from Government Stores during the blitz on Hong Kong. Gordon King and I, tired of the red tape necessary of requisitioning the hospital stationery, had driven down to the stores to help ourselves. The Supplies Officer had called us arch robbers, but the store building was right next to the petroleum storage tanks which were a target for enemy shelling and bombing. They were expected to go up in flames at any moment. Our mission was made none too soon because only a couple of hours later the tanks blew up and the whole area was placed out of bounds. No sooner did I think of the scalpel than I raced up to the flat to bring it down for the plants.

Slowly and carefully we slit the main stem of every plant in succession. The scalpel made a neat cut and, using the scissors as

forceps, we dissected out the grubs. By the following morning the plants looked as fresh as ever and we knew that our treatment had not disturbed their growth. The situation was under control and we examined the other patch. As luck would have it, there was not a sign of holes or grubs. This happened only shortly before I went into hospital, and Bill was able to tell me happily, before his tragic accident, that he had noticed some of the beds cracking with the tubers filling out. He didn't live to reap the reward of his labours, but at least he knew that we would have a fine crop of sweet potatoes before the year's end.

Managing the garden on my own after I came out of hospital was heavy work. After Bill's accident Mr Pegg couldn't bear to see me climbing up and down the steps to the roof – and I must admit I couldn't blame him. Knowing, however, that I wouldn't have taken the slightest notice of him, he asked the Vice-Chancellor to stop me.

Duncan Sloss knew better than to do this. He spoke quietly, telling me how concerned he was for my well-being and asked me, for his sake, to do something to ensure the safety of the steps. After giving it some thought, I begged a piece of electric flex from the police and, threading it through the holes at the end of the supports, gave the stairway the security it had previously lacked. Even Mr Sloss agreed that the safety measure was adequate. I wished only that I had thought of it when we put the steps in.

It was a busy time for the garden. The summer rains were over and preparations for the new season's sowing fell due. People were already growing *pak choi*, a local leafy vegetable. It required heavy watering – four times a day, according to Frank Fisher – but it was fast-growing. In a few weeks it would be ready for use. This appealed to me, though Frank asked who would do the watering.

I used one of the roof-beds because it was closer and planned for a later crop of tomatoes. I was by then keeping detailed notes of everything I did. Since our stay in camp was indefinite it was necessary for me to know what to do in future years. Looking over the notes now, I find that *pak choi* was sown on 1 September 1944. The seedlings were transplanted on 22 September and, on 14 October, only six weeks from the date of sowing, we had our first salad. *Pak choi* is not normally used in European cuisine and Ethel was unwilling to try it, but she noted the obvious relish with which Jeanne ate her salad and quickly changed her mind. It turned out to be delicious too when lightly cooked in oil.

- 25/8 - dug up 2 1/2 rows to Nation  
1 Kerosene in full
- 26/8 - Turned over, alone beds.
- 27/8 - ~ ~ onion beds
- 29/8 - Started turning over upper's, P.  
Tidied up roof.
- 30/8 Finished upper S.P. + 2 rows of  
found rats had eaten one.
- 31/8 Noted deterioration of banana trees
- 1/9 Set pak choi + lettuce
- 2/9 Set 1st bed of fr. anons on roof
- 3/9 Set 8 spring onions + transplanted  
strawberries
- 4/9 Set 2nd bed fr. anons on roof
- 5/9 manured alone beds.
- 6/9 set celery, spring onions, turnips + lettuce
- 7/9 Retrieved sword beans.
- 8/9 final turn over alone's
- 9/9
- 10/9
- 11/9 dug up 2 1/2 rows - 1 Kerosene + 1/2 bucket
- 12/9 transplanted 2 more strawberries.
- 13/9 set 1 row - existing stock.  
- Beans, Tomatoes, carrots  
Turnips
- 14/9 3 rows from wall bed stock
- 15/9
- 16/9 Celery up. also 2 beans
- 17/9 Turnips up.
- 18/9 Tomatoes up
- 19/9 Some Tomatoes eaten + 1
- 20/9 Bad monsoon weather.  
up.
- 21/9 Wind + rain.
- 22/9 Transplanted Pak Choi  
Re set 4th row S.P. for  
roof cutting
- 23/9 transplanted turnips. 2nd  
in turnips + carrots in all
- 24/9 Cut seed sword bean.
- 25/9 Found rat holes in S.P. bed
- 26/9 Wood ash in S.P. bed
- 27/9 Dug up 3 (Humphrey) rows S.P.  
large bucket + 1/2
- 28/9 Transplanted rest of pak choi
- 29/9 Transplanted 2 tomatoes on to fr.
- 30/9 Wind + rain
- 1/10
- 2/10 Dug yellow S.P. fr. small bed  
because of rats  
Set 2 rows from cutting  
from same bed
- 3/10 Transplanted Kg Himbei
- 4/10 Transplanted a few carrots
- 5/10
- 6/10
- 7/10 Set carrots - wall bed. 1 - Garden  
2 - Roof  
3 - House

Pages of my diary (using cigarette-package paper) of gardening activities.

8/10

- 9/10 Transplanted celery  
Eden & remove garden  
Took up onions
- 10/10 Dry sweet potatoes, gave away  
strawberries, broke down in 2/2
- 11/10 Replanted onions - Removed  
fl. soil from beds & put in pit  
for tomato beds - 1st sowed.
- 12/10 Transplanted Potts Pak Choi  
Raked beds - Wood ash
- 13/10 Carrots up - Raked beds

14/10 7th & 8th row S.P. from root  
Planted Camma from A. Burns  
15/10 Salad of Pak Choi & Tomatoes

16/10 Transplanted 10 Kg #4s  
17/10 rest " "

18/10 Transplanted rest of celery.

19/10 Transplanted Bug. 15" Tomato (13)  
Woodashed S.P. - 6 rows. set Tuesday

20/10 Prepared bed for flowers.  
Transplanted 4 Tom. + 8 celery  
21/10 to new seed bed -

22/10 Turnips up - started turning up  
corner beds due to wood ash.  
Chrysanthemums + rose hedges planted  
Dry corner beds

23/10 Completed corner bed.

24/10 Transplanted potatoes  
Dry up W. beds plant 6 potatoes

25/10 Set 2 rows S.P. from W. beds plant  
1st row.

26/10 Pulled 1st three rows.

27/10 Pulled 1st Turnips

28/10 Took 1st Tomato

20/10

31/10 Herklot's 3 new tomatoes arrived  
Wood ash. Treated small bed

1/11 2 1/2 ~ 2 1/2

2/11 1 2 1/2 ~ 2 1/2 Tomatoes, 1/2 Pak Choi

3/11

4/11

5/11 ( 2 1/2 ~ 2 1/2

6/11

6/11 Turned over peanut bed  
set nasturtium seeds -

7/11

8/11 Transplanted carrots

9/11

10/11 May 12. started work.

11/11 water turned off.

12/11

13/11 found 2 potato maggots.  
set Tomato seeds.

1 row S.P.  
Transplanted celery.

14/11 End of 1st Pak Choi bed

15/11

16/11

17/11 aphids on turnips  
6. Tenthred cabbage from "Buck"

18/11 fed Chrysanthemums

## 2nd Settling Sweet Potatoes

	Date Eat	Source -	Result -
1st Row	13/9/44	Same bed	Excellent. 13/1/45
2nd Row	14/9/44	Wall bed in garden	{ all red Plentiful but 9th del. immature 3/3
3rd Row	14/9/44	Wall bed in garden	{ 1st 1/2 disappointing (white) 2nd 1/2 red & white very good 16/3
4th Row	22/9/44	Roof	{ 1st 6 plants 3/4 - poor Rest V.G. - 5/4
5th Row	2/10/44	Small bed	14/4 - Outside 1/2 V.G. Inside small
6th Row	2/10/44	{ Small bed Same bed	1/5 - Outside 1/2 - V.G. 3/5 Inside - "
7th Row	14/10/44	Roof	23/5 - Excellent
8th Row	14/10/44	Roof	" "
9th Row	36/10/44	"Wayside" plant	4/6 V.G.
10th Row	26/10/44	4 "W.S." Rest roof	4/6 Excellent
11th Row	13/11/44	Roof	27/6/45 V.G. I
12th Row	24/11/44	1st row	27/6/45 Excellent
13th Row	24/11/44	Roof + 2nd Row	27/6/45 Fair -

Tabulated notes on sweet potato cultivation.

When the Japanese cut our mains water, old wells were opened for domestic use – there was one in our Village Green and the police did a fine job drawing the water with an old-fashioned pulley erected over the well. Domestic use did not, however, include the garden, which became more and more of a burden, and I missed Bill at every turn. I can't now remember what had happened to Mr Pegg. I don't think he joined in our sweet potato venture – it was too much like hard work – and he must have given me up altogether when I persisted in going up to the roof. Jeanne and Ethel were, of course, willing to help, but they weren't suited physically and found no pleasure in gardening – they cooked the produce. Fortunately, sweet potatoes needed no watering and one day, when I was trying desperately to saturate the vegetable beds while the water was turned on, help came unexpectedly.

It was no easy task to cover the distance between well and garden carrying a large bucket in one hand and a four-gallon watering-can in the other, especially when both were filled with water. Then there was the watering to be done – the containers couldn't just be tipped out. On each trip I had to skirt around the hunched figure of Captain Horner Smith, who was sitting by the side of the narrow pathway reading from *The Oxford Book of Verse*. He was a most unhappy person: he shared a room with two others and they detested one other. Captain Smith had been one of Jardine's senior captains on their Yangtse River fleet and Billy and I had travelled with him on our honeymoon. It had been a delightful ten-day journey through some of the most picturesque scenery in China, a journey made more pleasant by the courtesy of the master of the ship. I was fortunate enough to be his passenger again when I was ill in 1933. He personified kindness and consideration and even held up the ship for a night in Kiukiang, from which port I had to disembark for the mountains where the sanatorium I was heading for was situated. He did this because the town was in flood and I would have been stranded. Captain Smith had been transferred to Jardine's head office in Hong Kong only a few days before hostilities broke out and I was one of his few acquaintances. He had unfortunately been very ill during the first summer in camp. Internment affected him deeply: a shy man by nature, he became more and more withdrawn. No one dared speak to him.

I went around him clumsily, struggling with my bucket and watering-can so as not to spill a single precious drop. On the second



trip I became exasperated – he couldn't fail to see that he was blocking my way. Impatiently I asked him to move.

He grunted and moved a couple of feet to his right.

'Keep it up,' he called after me. 'This camp will make a strong woman out of you.'

Although I did not expect or wish him to help me I was surprised at his apparent lack of consideration, which was so unlike what I knew to be his nature. That he of all people should have acted and spoken in that manner was a disappointment.

The very next day happened to be parcel day. Captain Smith approached me beaming with pride. He had just been told that he had a parcel – his very first in the camp – and could he please walk up with me when it was the time to go because he didn't know the routine. Naturally I said he could. Suddenly he was his normal self again – it was amazing how a little encouragement could boost morale. I later spoke to Jeanne and Ethel, telling them that I had decided to enlist the Captain's assistance in the garden. I could no longer manage single-handed.

We made it a business proposition, offering him a quarter share of the produce if he would help me carry the water – I preferred to do the watering of the plants myself – on days when the supply was turned on. I suggested that he think the matter over and give me his reply when he was ready. He wanted to begin immediately: it appeared that he had watched me struggle with the water with growing concern and had longed to be of assistance but, being shy, hadn't known how to ask. He was afraid also that his motive might be mistaken for greed because we had such a fine garden. He told me he sat where he did because he wanted to be near at hand. He wanted no return for his help and was quite resigned to living on the food from the communal kitchen; besides, he had no facilities for private cooking and not the slightest desire to cook. He would be happy just to have something to do. I suggested that he give us his oil ration and, in return, he could have a share of whatever we cooked.

From then on Horner Smith took over, not just the watering but all the heavy work – he was so grateful for the opportunity to be useful. Instead of reading poetry, he spent his time tending the plants. I showed him how and when to nip the tomato laterals and lent him my precious gadget to break up the soil. He was an apt pupil and a pleasant companion besides. He swept between the

rows of vegetables, an attention the garden had never before received and, when summer came again, he found the time to put up a small shelter to shade me from the hot sun. One day he stole a clove of garlic from the kitchen, where he was helping out temporarily, hoping that I could make it grow. He said it was the first time he had ever stolen anything and looked so guilty, poor man. I still feel pangs of conscience when I think of him standing in the queue for the septic tank – even I shirked that chore. He was the neatest and most fastidious of men. He later confessed that it was days before he could rid his hands of the smell, but the slush from the septic tank was the only fertilizer we had in camp and the garden was badly in need.

I had for some time past saved the water from washing the towels used for my menstruation – I was losing blood heavily – knowing that blood and bone was one of the standard mixtures for plant food. By the time Horner came on the scene, saving every drop of water had become a dire necessity but even this was not sufficient for the hungry soil. As well as the vegetables (the sweet potatoes needed no fertilizer), I had a tiny flower garden of nasturtiums, a solitary wild rose and a clump of mauve coloured chrysanthemums, which turned a lovely shade of bronze after the blood treatment. This caused some surprise to other gardeners, but I didn't disclose the reason and was able to pick a few flowers for the cemetery when I made my regular visits.

## ***Chapter Eleven***

While we were happily occupied with our garden, the rest of the camp also found plenty to do. Because extra food was so pressing a need, many had gardens of their own. The very quality of life was uniformly low, a standard brought about by the degradation, deprivation and despair forced upon us.

To combat the misery and frustrations of the inescapable living conditions, hidden talents found expression in all branches of the performing arts – there could be no lack of talent considering the sheer number of people. All forms of entertainment – plays, ballets and many concerts – mostly originating from the Married Quarters or the bungalows, were enthusiastically brought into fruition and a high standard of production was achieved with help from other workers to the benefit and enjoyment of the entire camp. Some of the fine but useless clothing found an outlet on the stage. Being entirely unsuited for everyday wear, their owners generously donated them for the productions. The gowns were worn again and again after clever modification, and imagination went a long way towards achieving the correct atmosphere.

Special permission had to be requested from the Japanese authorities for each gathering. This was usually granted and, even though the entertainments gave them added opportunities for dispensing punishment, we accepted these as being in a good cause. There was the occasion, for instance, when a concert was arranged on the open lawn of the Prison Officers' Club where we had our canteen on a pleasant summer evening. A team of Japanese press and cameramen descended on us to take movies for propaganda purposes. They wanted to show how happy and contented we were. No sooner had the cameras begun filming, than some of the children, squatting on the grass in front, gave the victory sign. Immediately everyone joined in. Somehow the photographers seemed oblivious to anything unusual, but when the films were developed all forms of entertainment were suspended for a month.

On another occasion the Japanese authorities asked us to prepare for certain important visitors and a special play, *The Death of Nelson*, was staged. It was very well produced – the costumes alone would have done credit to a professional troupe but, although our visitors understood sufficient English to follow the gist of the story, they seemed in some doubt as to whether or not to join in the applause. However, when the audience rose to sing ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ at the conclusion (we weren’t allowed to sing ‘God Save the King’) they stood to attention. They must have regretted this later because, unable to find any reasonable excuse to fault the performance, they punished us just the same.

We were in trouble, too, for the ballet *Esther*. An enthusiastic audience packed the main hall of St Stephen’s College on a Saturday evening. The music was excellent and the dancing, considering the circumstances, was first-rate. The authorities, however, were strongly critical of the costumes, which had been made from mosquito nets dipped in solutions of mercurochrome and gentian blue from the hospital dispensary. Perhaps our enthusiasm had taken us a little beyond the realm of prudence, but the show was a huge success.

Football and softball – introduced by the Americans before they were repatriated – were played on the large football field near the jetty during the early months of internment, but the loss of energy brought on by the summer heat and poor diet soon put an end to so active an exercise. Some of the women indulged enthusiastically in regular physical jerks on the rooftops of the Married Quarters but this, too, was dropped in favour of casual walks along the inner circumference of the barbed wire fence. When the beach at Tweed Bay was opened for several hours daily during the months of May to October, the children spent many a happy afternoon swimming in the sea, but the long trek there and back under the wall of the prison, and the idea of a guard in attendance to count the heads, put many off this sport.

Each Monday evening before curfew an auction held on the Village Green of the Indian Quarters provided free entertainment for all who cared to attend. One of our neighbours conducted proceedings and proved to be an excellent auctioneer. Every unwanted article found a new owner, yet little money changed hands – goods were traded on an exchange basis.

Sitting through the long winter evenings of 1944/5, without the comfort of electric lights or any form of heating, proved a real test of

fortitude. Early evening curfew restricted inter-block visiting and a new ruling that no more than eight persons were permitted to congregate on any one spot added boredom to confinement. I made a little oil lamp from a discarded milk bottle filled almost full with water, on top of which floated a little peanut oil. A wick made of string threaded through a pierced tin top completed the device. The lighted wick gave sufficient brilliance for Jeanne and Ethel to have a game of patience while I sat by, sometimes rolling cigarettes from toilet paper filled with dried sweet potato leaves mixed with used butts – I felt the need of the occasional cigarette as a diversion from packaging seeds. Most evenings, though, Horner and a few others would join us for a cup of mint tea, or there would be a talk by someone who hadn't exhausted his store of reminiscences. I recall one by Dr Frank Ashton on his mission work in China and his meeting with his 'good friend Major Ho Shai-lai' – my brother Robbie, who used his Chinese name and had trained at Woolwich, was in the Chinese army (he later became a general.) Dr Ashton subsequently settled in Hong Kong at the Nethersole Hospital next door to my father's townhouse. By that time I was married so, although he knew my Father and knew that Major Ho was his son, he was not aware that I was Sir Robert's daughter.

Probably because of the diverse nature of the groups and the subtle differences in their living conditions, each section of the camp developed a character of its own. Internees who went up to St Stephen's College had discovered in the main building a wealth of household equipment and, as a consequence, they lived more comfortably than most. The H-shaped main building with its small compact cubicles housed mainly single or unattached men – many being unattached because they had obeyed the evacuation order to send their families away. Their ages ranged from around twenty to seventy and over. Many were professional or academic people like our Vice-Chancellor and other members of the University staff. Businessmen like Frank Fisher were well represented, as were ships' officers and engineers who happened to be caught in Hong Kong. In short, it contained a conglomerate of men of all ages and stations, many with contacts in town who kept them supplied with regular food parcels and titbits of news (gleaned from putting two and two together from the contents of the parcels which meant, more often than not, that they arrived at the figure of five instead of four). Whether their deductions and prognostications were right or

wrong, they spoke at all times with strong conviction and many were the rumours that emanated from this quarter, most of which Frank Fisher relayed to us when he came visiting in the evenings. Whatever their shortcomings, the St Stephen's group could always be relied upon to pull their weight in a crisis: they shared enthusiastically in all responsibilities and duties of the camp. As a group, they seemed to be more able to accept their situation with a philosophical cheerfulness, achieving a degree of independence and self-sufficiency. Above all, unlike many others, they were spared the agony of standing by helplessly watching their families slowly starve.

The small Dutch community, subsequently joined by the Norwegians, numbered well under one hundred. They kept mostly to themselves and in all those years I cannot recall any direct contact I ever had with any of their nationals. The Americans, on the other hand, stood out as the most favoured nation: throughout their short internment they enjoyed many privileges in food and accommodation which were denied the rest of the camp. Whether they had the money to bribe the Japanese authorities, or they were merely given these privileges to arouse dissension among internees, I am unable to say, but I remember the envy we felt towards them even though there was nothing we could do about it.

The flats in the Indian Quarters were distinguished by their lack of amenities but, concrete floors and native latrines notwithstanding, they had their strong points. Besides, the smaller numbers in each flat gave rise to fewer cases of temperamental incompatibility. Not so the main blocks or their nearby bungalows – for them there was no such safeguard and emotion ran high as intolerance deepened. The pressure of children heightened their difficulties; from the overcrowded rooms there was no escape. Although some of the windows had a view of hills or sea, others overlooked the prison compound, in itself a depressing prospect. Some quarters had tiny windows from which the only view was an enclosed courtyard filled with unhappy, untidy and listless people whose sole purpose in life was concerned with the all-important problems connected with food. In a few cases, people lived within the confines of the underside of a fire-escape stairway, their privacy and comfort sheltered by a mere sheet slung across the front.

There was at the same time more companionship and greater togetherness to be found in these quarters. Parents shared a

common bond in anxieties over their young and friends showed incredible understanding of one another's problems. They gossiped over their cups of tea and loved, quarrelled and made up or learnt to live for years in the same room in a silence more chilling than any spoken word. In this strained atmosphere rumour spread wildly, becoming more and more distorted as it was passed from mouth to mouth. With the communal office situated within this area, however, the Married Quarters maintained credit for always being in the forefront with any authentic news.

## ***Chapter Twelve***

Although it was intended by the authorities that we should have no contact with the people of Hong Kong, they obviously felt it desirable that we be informed of what was happening – at least insofar as it suited their interests to do so. A bundle of their English-language newspaper, *The Hong Kong News*, its pages filled with the most outrageous propaganda, was sent into the camp daily with the rations and a copy was given free of charge to any internee who cared to collect it. There were amongst us a number who refused on principle. Others read the paper to relieve the boredom of internment or to have something to talk about, while others, who were of a more practical disposition, availed themselves of the opportunity to add to their precious stock of kindling for a chatty or to supplement the toilet paper of which we were so desperately in need.

It was only natural that one and all should hunger for news, and the repeated success stories of Japan's armed forces during the early months of our internment, however hard we tried to read between the lines of enemy propaganda, gave us discouraging food for thought. As their victorious armies swept onwards it seemed that nothing could stop their advance. According to the headlines, the United States navy suffered 'total annihilation' not once but several times. Details were given of vessels sunk at each engagement, and, were it not for the grossly exaggerated figures which quite belied any possibility of truth, the news would have been more depressing still. We knew, of course, that the situation could only have been better than what they would have us believe; nevertheless, it was not to be denied that the outlook for the Allies was extremely grave.

Singapore had fallen on 15 February 1942. This was followed by the loss of Malaya and the Philippines in rapid succession. The paper made much of the report of their air raid on Darwin, which, it said, had been completely destroyed. This, we were gleefully told, was but a prelude to the imminent occupation of Australia by His Imperial Nipponese Majesty's expeditionary forces. The entry of



their submarines into Sydney harbour in June, only a few months later, showed just how close they were to Australia's shores. The Coral Sea Battle was hailed as a great victory for the Imperial Navy – Japan's losses were not revealed. We later learnt, of course, that this engagement actually halted their intended advance on Port Moresby and proved to be the turning point of war in the Pacific.

The time was to come when even *The Hong Kong News* deemed it expedient to lay less stress on their continued 'successes' in this region and its attention was directed towards the progress of Japan's allies in Europe. With the change of emphasis in the field of action, outline maps of the Mediterranean region, the Balkan Peninsula and southern Russia appeared almost overnight on the inside walls of our quarters and even I, at Bill Faid's instigation, spent laborious hours tracing the complicated maps of central and southern Europe from a borrowed atlas on poor quality tissue paper, so that we could more easily piece together the disjointed news we received through the various channels, for secret radios and the 'bamboo' wireless, as well as sundry rumours, made their contribution to our sources of information.

As time wore on we sensed a growing feeling of hope. Pointers of a less depressing nature began to penetrate the intense fog of enemy propaganda but, as always, any reference to Britain never failed to give us a picture of its general decline. It was stressed that Britain, already a defeated nation, was completely at variance with her allies; that her people were despairing and dispirited and could not possibly effect the landing on the continent which the disgruntled Russians demanded. However, throughout our years of hardship and starvation, we maintained an abiding faith in Britain's ability to win wars.

Local news aimed at giving an impression of an East Asian Utopia, with a happy and contented Hong Kong in its midst. The persistent and rather pathetic endeavours of the government to create a 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', with the object of benefiting all Asiatics, was the guiding principle on which local propaganda was based. Reports and photographs of daily activities appeared frequently – victory marches, festivals of Japanese, Chinese and Indian origin, and anniversary celebrations. A racing gymkhana was planned for 18 February 1942 as a prelude to the resumption of regular meetings – *mafoos* (stable boys) had stayed at their posts during the fighting so the ponies were in good condition.

The Governor opened the first meeting on 25 April.

Wittingly or unwittingly, they aped British customs. Even observance of the anniversary of the Mikado's birth was organized on similar lines to those which previously marked our King's Birthday celebrations. However, instead of encouraging voluntary attendance at these functions, pressure was exerted on prominent citizens to be present and the unfortunate Council members were required to march in a body from the Council chamber to join the assembled public in paying homage to the Son of Heaven. Citations and public addresses followed solemn and obsequious bows, repeated three times in succession, in the direction of Tokyo and the Imperial Palace.

We gathered from reading *The Hong Kong News* that construction of the civil administration was based on the same pattern as that which existed before the Japanese occupation. The Governor, Lieutenant-General Rensuke Isogai, was brought out from Tokyo. Reports of his arrival in the colony could have been descriptions of similar events in the past, except that the Japanese bow took the place of the British handshake, and the crowds lining the streets shouted 'Banzai!', the traditional Japanese greeting meaning 'Long live the Emperor!'

Administrative policy rested in the hands of Japanese officials, supported by the Chinese Representative Council and the Chinese Co-operative Council to which prominent citizens were nominated. As was to be expected, they were given no power to govern but were merely tools of the ruling Japanese. Resolutions were placed before them to which they were forced to give formal assent. But it was the Councils who shouldered blame or censure from the people, particularly when harsh edicts were promulgated. The situation of councillors was, to say the least, unenviable. The merest hint of resignation was to risk imprisonment. Thoughts of possible torture for themselves and reprisals against their families dominated their thoughts. The authorities missed no opportunity to distort and magnify their every action to demonstrate their 'support' for the new regime. The humiliation to which they were subjected and the strain of insecurity could only be subjects for conjecture by their sympathizers in captivity. Confirmation of the mental anguish which was theirs was seen on their faces when the war was over. It was only then that we fully appreciated the relative freedom and liberty of thought, and in many respects of action, which we in

Stanley had enjoyed over the years.

In the East as well as in the West there are proverbs to express belief in the futility of pressure: an animal may be led to water, but it cannot be forced to drink. M.K. Lo, my sister's husband, had been one of Hong Kong's leading citizens long before the Japanese invasion. He was head of a leading firm of solicitors and, in addition to innumerable other offices and interests, he served on Hong Kong's Legislative Council. He was well known as a fearless advocate for all matters concerning the welfare of the people and was, in particular, an outspoken champion of the Chinese community which he represented. An obvious vehicle for enhancing the prestige of the new government, he was spirited away on Hong Kong's capitulation and was held in solitary captivity until he consented to join the council of the new regime, a step which he was encouraged to take by our own officials, in the hope that he could work for the good of the local population and perhaps, in some way, assist the internees. Forced under duress to co-operate with the enemy, he adopted an attitude of passive resistance. He had perforce to attend meetings of the new Council but sat quietly through each one hardly opening his mouth. His silence naturally did not pass unnoticed and, one day, he was pressed to give an opinion on how better relations could be fostered with the sullen and unco-operative Chinese.

Although there are many similarities in the ancient cultures of China and Japan and in some respects they share a common heritage, there are fundamental and irreconcilable differences in custom and belief between the two nations. Chinese people are perhaps over-modest and sensitive in matters pertaining to relationships between men and women, whereas the Japanese in general adopt an easy-going attitude which causes embarrassment to the average Chinese. Public baths in Japan, for instance, are patronized by both sexes without restriction and I can remember my sisters and I being shaken as children to the roots of our Victorian upbringing during a summer vacation spent in the northern coastal port of Tsingtao, which was at that time under Japanese rule. It had been ceded by China to Germany for ninety-nine years following the occupation of Kiaochow Bay by the German navy after the murder of two German missionaries in Shangtung in 1897. Japanese forces took Tsingtao from the Germans in 1914 and held it until 1922 when, under the Washington agreement, it was returned to China. Beautiful sea

beaches in and around Tsingtao, together with mild climatic conditions, made her the leading summer resort on the China coast and the Japanese themselves did no less than justice to their own colony. The thing that shocked us as children was the complete abandon of Japanese bathers of both sexes who, after swimming, would slip off their bathing costumes and walk across the beach to the fresh-water showers stark naked. Similarly, the occupation forces in Hong Kong were in the habit of ignoring public lavatories when the dictates of nature indicated their use. This habit was widely discussed and deplored by the local population. Not only was it repugnant to their way of life, but whatever respect the Chinese might have had for their Japanese masters was completely dispelled at the sight of such immodesty. And so, when pressed to voice an opinion in Council, M.K. replied:

‘Excellency, the Chinese are a modest and conservative people. They respect rules of propriety and practise normal habits of self-control. If Your Excellency would have their co-operation, I would suggest that, as a first step, His Imperial Majesty’s armed forces be instructed to refrain from relieving themselves in public. I am sure that this would go some way towards reducing the disrespect at present entertained towards them by the local inhabitants.’

The story goes on to say that his colleagues in Council accepted and recorded this contribution in all seriousness – it was a long speech from one who seldom opened his mouth. In fact, following these distressing years, M.K.’s selfless devotion in the task of rebuilding Hong Kong in the immediate post-war period earned him a knighthood in the King’s Birthday honours of 1948.

My father was more fortunate. His advanced age and his detachment from public life doubtless accounted in considerable measure for his being relatively unmolested. Although he was summoned to Hong Kong from time to time, he was allowed to live mainly in Macau during the occupation. He suffered heavily, however, in property and financial loss. Besides having his premises and buildings confiscated for enemy use, his home on the Peak was a wreck as a result of war damage and subsequent looting. His town house was occupied off and on by Japanese officials.

It gave us considerable amusement to note their childish efforts to obliterate all traces of European influence. Everyone was encouraged to learn Japanese. Daily lessons were published in *The Hong Kong News* and, from advertisements in the paper, there was

apparently no shortage of teachers. Japanese was made a compulsory subject in schools. Street names were erased and new ones substituted: Des Voeux Road was changed to Higashi Showa Dori – the same applied to names of buildings, shops and hotels. The Gloucester Hotel became known as the Matsubara, after Mr Matsubara, the manager. Ironically, he had been known before the war to be an admirer of British people and their way of life.

In fairness to the authorities, it should be stated that a real attempt had been made in the early days of the occupation to promote the goodwill of the people, but any effort in this direction had been nullified by the savage cruelty of the gendarmerie and the loose and immoral behaviour of the troops. The gendarmerie instituted a policy of government by terror, encouraging the inhabitants, through force and suspicion, to spy on one another. No one felt safe. No one was. At the same time, the army indulged in an orgy of robbery with violence, or of merely helping themselves to anything at all which attracted their fancy and then beating up the victims they had robbed. Officers forcibly turned people out of their homes to make room for their own occupation and, most unfortunate of all, the uncontrolled lust of the common troops for sexual gratification made it unsafe for women between the ages of the early teens and the sixties to venture out of their homes alone. It was said that sexual gratification was believed by Japanese authorities to be a necessity and that rape was a conqueror's right. It had been the same in all the conquered Chinese cities. Their offence against the people served only to make any Japanese national both hated and feared. One of Hong Kong's leading Chinese surgeons<sup>1</sup>, writing of his reminiscences, said that of the women who came to his clinic and hospital he personally treated 'wives so heavy with child that assault had brought on miscarriage and young tender girls whose minds had been affected by the pain and horror of multiple rape'. In spite of a natural reticence on the part of the victim, who would rather suffer the ordeal of physical distress than the shame of exposure in order to have treatment, it is said that the number of known cases of rape, on a conservative count, reached ten thousand during the first months following our surrender. The glut of illegitimate enemy babies born at the end of 1942, although later absorbed into the community, gave proof at the time of this particular outrage.

Administratively there was a total lack of co-ordination among those in charge. The army, navy and civil authorities apparently

each gave their own orders without prior consultation, and the gendarmerie stepped in whenever they felt so inclined. The lack of co-operation resulted frequently in new laws or regulations being announced in the press, only to be cancelled by a contradictory statement on the following day. Sometimes an order might be changed again and again. This led inevitably to confusion and consternation, causing the whole structure of the government to collapse.

---

<sup>1</sup>Li, Shu-Fan, *Hong Kong Surgeon* (London, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1964).

## ***Chapter Thirteen***

Throughout the years of our internment, until the fall of Germany in 1945 when it was no longer sent in to us, the columns of *The Hong Kong News* continued to be our main source of information. Added to this were the titbits of news brought in by the late arrivals to the camp and the uncertain traffic of patients who, through the persistent efforts of Dr Selwyn-Clarke, were sent into town for X-rays or for special treatment requiring a more protracted stay. Our Vice-Chancellor, after an absence of several months for a stomach complaint, came back with a good deal of authentic information. The war was going well, he said, and I remember him trying to describe for us, with pencil and paper, the air offensive against Germany – how night after night Allied bombers would set out to deliver systematic ‘carpet’ attacks on German cities.

His news of family and friends were the most satisfying for me. He had seen M.K. Lo and other members of my family. My sister Eva had called on him during one of her lightning visits to Hong Kong. She was concerned about my health and was trying to get me out of Stanley so that I could join the others in China. Mr Sloss said that they all appeared well but the general situation demanded their apparent detachment. They wished to assure me that a lack of direct contact did not in any way mean a lack of interest in my welfare.

Mr Sloss had managed to arrange through M.K. Lo for parcels to be sent to University staff both in Stanley and at Shamshuipo and was to be personally responsible for payment to be made after the war. Soon after his return some member of the University staff, including myself, would receive a parcel each week from an unknown sender. He also gave us news of Lindsay Ride, Professor of Physiology, who had made his escape from Shamshuipo Camp. Now a Colonel, Ride headed the British Army Aid Group, an organization which could be described as Hong Kong’s resistance movement operating from China. Gordon King, Mr Sloss said, was arranging for former students from Hong Kong University and others to be

admitted into Chinese universities which, moving ahead of the Japanese advance, had set up institutions in and around Chungking. He also practised his profession – Madame Chiang Kai-Shek was one of his patients. In view of my children being in the care of his wife in Australia, this news cheered me very much. I had waited with increasing impatience for my turn to be sent out for X-rays. Professor Digby had been concerned for some time over a vague, non-specific pain in my back. Unfortunately, mine was not considered an urgent condition and, in fact, my turn never came. Meanwhile, Mr Sloss's news alleviated the frustrations of waiting.

We received the occasional Red Cross postcard and to some there came as well the rare letter from overseas. These comprised the sum total of our legitimate means of communication. Illegitimate sources included underground contacts, secret radios hidden within the camp – it was said by some that there were three and we were transmitting as well as receiving messages – and the occasional Chinese-language newspaper passed over the wire by the Formosan guards who traded with our own blackmarketeers. One was never certain as to what constituted news or what was merely rumour, but each item was analysed, rationalized and embellished by those who classed themselves as experts before it was promulgated to the rest of the camp via the innumerable queues. A picture, therefore, of the world situation in general rose vaguely before us and a clear idea of what was happening in Hong Kong penetrated the heavy screen of our isolation. Distorted some of these pictures may have been, but distortion did not detract from their value, it only added interest. We were now assured – were we ever in doubt – that there would be an end to our captivity. As for Hong Kong itself, where our main interest was centred, we knew that in spite of all the talk of Utopian conditions, many of its residents, including some of my family, had decided in less than a year after the occupation that co-prosperity was not for them.

It was not easy, particularly for family groups, to leave the colony when it was first occupied. Weeks of anxious waiting followed applications for permits. Even then their devious journey into free China was both unpleasant and hazardous. For the young and venturesome, an alternative if more risky way was to slip across Hong Kong's border, to meet up with guerilla forces. It was a different story in the later stages of the occupation when acute food shortage necessitated an active programme of depopulation. People were



grabbed from the streets and forcibly deported. This meant dumping them across the border, along the coast, or on neighbouring islands. When this was seen to be a regular procedure, the government in Chungking paid outlaws to collect the deportees and escort them in bands of one thousand into China. By August 1943 the population had decreased by one hundred thousand.

My sister Grace, as well as the rest of the Gittins family and many others, left during the first summer. One September day in 1942 a stranger approached me at the foot of our stairs and handed me a letter. He left without a word.

I never knew how the letter had come into his possession or who he was. A few days before I had received a parcel which contained, amongst other things, Grace's padded Chinese gown – a *mien-po*. This when the weather was still so warm had been a puzzle which the letter now explained. It was from Grace. She said briefly that they had received permission to travel and that she and Horace would soon be leaving for China with young Shirley and the teenage daughters of M.K. and Vic. The world grew suddenly bleak and empty: as long as Grace was in Hong Kong, I had at least a psychological prop. With her in China, I was completely on my own.

The worst feature of our isolation was the deliberate cruelty on the part of the authorities in denying any direct communication between camps. Although from May 1942 we had been allowed to write a card of twenty-five words each month and we naturally used this facility to its fullest extent, cards were written and not despatched. Letters would arrive at Headquarters and would not be distributed, and, even though Shamshuipo and the Argyle Street camp for officers were only a few miles from us, in the three and a half years of our internment, opportunity was never given for a single visit. The excuse made to us for delay in distribution of mail was allegedly because of a lack of censorship facilities, even though the Japanese knew that the outgoing cards at least had been through the hands of our own censors. What earthly reason they could have had for denying visits between husband and wife, between parent and son or between brother and sister was never given. The very first time the men came over was after Japan's surrender. By then Billy was no longer in Hong Kong.

In order to let us know that they were still alive the men used to send us one military yen each month. The money would arrive at the communal office, to be distributed accordingly. Should one's remit-

tance fail to come, one would be haunted by fears as to the cause. The uncertainty of whether a husband or father was ill or dead – or had been drafted overseas – would be tormenting, but there remained at least a thread of hope. When the yen I had come to expect from Billy did not turn up on Christmas Eve of 1943, Mabel and I lived in a state of anxiety for several weeks. We were among the more fortunate, however. I wrote to the Swiss representative of the International Red Cross in Hong Kong and, after considerable delay, received word to the effect that as far as was known Billy had been transferred. Six months later I had confirmation from Billy himself. He had been ill, he said, but was feeling better and the cherry blossoms were out. As flowering cherries did not bloom in Hong Kong, we knew then for certain that he had been sent to Japan. Some of the others heard nothing at all and remained for the rest of the time in uncertainty and ignorance.

Throughout the years of our internment, I received only two letters from Billy – the one I have just mentioned was his second. The first came during the summer of 1942 when an epidemic of diphtheria in Shamshuipo had taken the life of his friend and business associate, Paul Jack. Paul was the first of the three partners to die. His brother, James Mackenzie Jack, was sent to Japan even before Billy. He died of illness in September 1944. Because of censorship restrictions Billy's letter referred to Paul's death in a roundabout way, but his implied request that Paul's widow be informed settled the matter in my mind beyond question. I carried the burden of my knowledge for a day or two, wondering what I should do. I turned finally to Bill Faid for guidance. We agreed that since the Japanese never dispensed information of this nature officially, and as the news had come from Billy, I had no alternative but to comply with his request. Bill suggested that I should stress the possibility that my interpretation of the information might be incorrect. I remember asking Betty Jack to join me on the hillside for a cup of tea and, taking advantage of a time when there was a lull in camp activities – most people rested in the early afternoon – broke the sad news to her as gently as I could. Poor woman – they were a devoted couple. She accepted the news bravely, but telling her was like striking a friend who could not hit back. We sat on without speaking for a while. I had no details to give her. All I could offer was my heartfelt sympathy and the comradeship of shared grief.

Although I longed for news of the children, I received only one

letter from Elizabeth in Australia. In this she said that John was well and growing fast and, whilst assuring me that she was fully recovered, mentioned that she had had scarlet fever and had been away from school – the Presbyterian Ladies' College in East Melbourne – for six weeks.

I did not know until after I joined them at the end of the war that she had been awarded a half scholarship by the School Council, although Billy's friends said he had known of the good news. The happiness this knowledge must have given him in his long months of illness in a Japanese prison camp I can well imagine. It appeared that, although he had recovered slightly when he wrote to me about the cherry blossoms, he was ill for most of the time, and after fifteen months of struggle, he finally succumbed. I did not hear of his death in March 1945 until I reached Sydney six months after it had happened.

Some people received letters more often – I must have been among the unlucky ones. I wrote each month to either Billy or to the children and, sometimes, I would vary it with one sent into town. But the safety of the recipient could so easily be jeopardized by association with an enemy alien that one had to be constantly on guard so as not to expose him or her to the watchful eye of some gendarmerie spy. I sent a card to Billy's parents towards the end of 1943. The couple were in Kunming, a town in southwest China and, according to Mabel, would be due to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary in December. The card conveyed the good wishes of Mabel and myself. We heard when war was over that they did, in fact, receive our greeting.

We had three opportunities for sending parcels to prisoners in the military camps. The first occasion was within the first weeks of our internment. I was still billeted in the Married Quarters. It was to be in celebration of Easter and, because only a very limited number of parcels were permitted, the information was disclosed to only a favoured few. How I came to hear about it now escapes me. I know it was purely by accident that I heard that a small parcel, submitted to the Welfare Office by a certain date in March, would have a good chance of being forwarded to Shamshuipo. Determined to take advantage of the opportunity, especially as I was still unhappy about Billy not knowing that I had come into Stanley, I began to think of ways and means. I had no idea what to send. I possessed absolutely nothing which could in any way be labelled as suitable, nor could

anything be purchased even if I had had the money to do so. How was I going to include a message? All thoughts pointed in one direction: a toilet roll. Everyone was talking about the one taken out by the escapees in which were concealed lists of internees in Stanley. We had been issued with a roll each only a few days before. This would have to be used even though it was something I could ill afford to spare. I wrote a note and, under Bill Faid's supervision, hid it within the folds of paper. It took hours of patient unrolling and re-rolling but we agreed that the final result would stand up to reasonably careful inspection without being detected. Bill had supported my action. He said that it was as much a prisoner's prerogative to receive messages as well as parcels and it was every prisoner's duty to try to communicate with the outside world.

Triumphantly I delivered my parcel before the appointed day. The people at the Welfare Office were obviously surprised to see me. There must have been someone who resented my being included – or perhaps my look of satisfaction had antagonized them. Early the following morning I was summoned to appear before the former Colonial Secretary, now the Representative of Internees. Mr Gimson asked if it were true I had a message concealed in my parcel, and, completely taken aback, I was forced to admit that it was. I was asked to produce the incriminating evidence.

Imagine the indignity of having to unravel a roll of toilet paper in what was virtually the Colonial Secretary's office, in the presence of the CS himself! Before his unbelieving eyes, I unrolled yard upon yard of the paper which Bill and I had so carefully rewound only two days before. One of the young men on his staff turned to suppress a snigger but the CS was furious. He could not understand how I could be so selfish as to expose the entire camp to possible reprisals in the event of discovery (a contingency which, I might add, was hardly likely to occur – the Japanese had more than enough on their hands). Had I no consideration for the women and children who were suffering enough without my adding to it? He went on and on and finally said that as it was my first offence I would be let off with a caution but, should I attempt anything else, my name would be posted on every notice board so that everyone in the camp might know what a selfish person I was.

I gathered the precious paper in my arms and left without a word. I was in disgrace, but I was unrepentant. I was none the worse for my experience and, had my scheme worked, the result would have

been worth every bit of the effort.

My second parcel, sent at Christmas 1942, consisted of a pair of slippers made from the khaki coloured woollen material we received as cardigans from the Red Cross. Presumably it left Stanley without incident, but I never knew whether Billy received it.

The last opportunity came at the end of 1943. There was by then no point in trying to send a message and, once again, I wondered what the parcel should hold. With sudden inspiration I decided to alter the *mien-po* Grace had sent me into a short jacket for Billy. Bill Faid strongly opposed the idea on the grounds that a padded garment would have little chance of reaching Billy. He must have had doubts too about my ability to make the necessary alterations – *mien-pos* are not easy things to work with and my plan would constitute quite a major operation – but knowing as well my nature he chose not to make that an excuse. However, I was determined to proceed and cut into the gown to put an end to further argument.

I spent every spare minute of several weeks remaking it. Having cut off the bottom half and split down the centre of the upper front, I unpicked the seams, planning to use the material from the skirt section to widen the body and sleeves to fit Billy. The patterned material added to my difficulties but the jacket eventually took shape. George Byrne, whose build I decided was similar to Billy's, obligingly acted as model. The finished article was declared by all to be a credit to my skill and enterprise. I have to admit that it far exceeded my own expectations. I was not to know that, by the time the parcel left Stanley, Billy was well on his way to Japan.

As it was generally believed that no government would contemplate leaving us in the appalling conditions in which we existed, all sorts of tentative arrangements were made in preparation for a sudden order for departure: where we wished to go and with whom we wished to travel, should the choice be left to us. Answers to these and other questions were collected and collated in the communal office. One day, Mr Pegg approached me with the suggestion that, should I be planning to go to Australia, as presumably I would be to join the children, I should travel with his wife Bobby, who would be heading for New Zealand. Naturally I agreed, accepting the general principle that the devil one knew would be preferable in such circumstances.

The best part of a year slipped by without any realization of our expectations and hope had begun to fade when on Empire Day

(24 May) 1943 a notice was posted in the communal office. Everyone rushed up to read the announcement. I cannot now remember the exact wording but it was something to the effect that the Japanese authorities, as an act of grace, had agreed to arrange for the repatriation of women and children, the aged and the sick, to take place within the next few months.

At long last relief had come. There was intense excitement. It would be a simple matter to compile lists of women with children but, because of the generally poor health of all internees, and especially as numbers were limited, it was far more difficult to determine who was sick enough to qualify for immediate evacuation. Our doctors had an awkward problem on their hands.

Bill Faid agreed that I had a strong case. Not only had I a past history of tuberculosis but I had lost a lot of weight and barely touched six stone on the scales. Moreover, had I the children with me there would have been no question of my evacuation, but I had done the right thing and sent them away – surely this would not now be held against me.

Bill advised me to talk to Dr Ashton, who was in charge of our clinic in the Indian Quarters. Unfortunately, he knew nothing of my medical history or my children and, as I never had reason to attend the clinic, he merely saw me as a thin but perfectly active internee. It was not surprising, therefore, that he refused to see any reason for recommending my name to be included on any list, and no amount of persuasion or tears would sway his judgement.

By the time the Canadians left four months later, our repatriates were no nearer to going. I think that repeated disappointments had made us lose interest – it almost seemed as if we no longer cared. As we went up to the cemetery and sat by the casuarina trees to watch them board the *Tei-a-Maru*, which was to take them to Goa for exchange, we knew that nothing more substantial than the verbal messages they carried would ever reach the outside world. Perhaps we had become conditioned into believing that direct contact was not so important after all – we did not even question why no Britisher had been included. The explanation given us that the Australian government had been unwilling to exchange able-bodied Japanese pearl fishermen who were familiar with Australian coastal waters for women and children, the aged and the sick, received ready acceptance. We did not even blame the Australian government for making this stand.

## ***Chapter Fourteen***

We would have drifted indefinitely in this atmosphere of listless apathy had it not been for a series of distressing happenings which instilled a new tension and spread an intense and nameless fear into the life of the camp. Each event appeared initially as an isolated incident, but later each was found to be just one more link in the chain of tragic circumstances which led ultimately to the execution and imprisonment not only of a number of internees but of many others outside the camp who were either genuinely implicated or merely suspected of having been so.

To begin with, however, after the excitement brought on by the prospect of early repatriation, we gravely resumed our tedious routine. Life was made a little happier because of hope. The very thought of being with our loved ones again, and living under conditions more suited to our needs, acted as a beacon in the distance – even though the majority would have to remain interned for some while longer.

Meanwhile, the chores and the queues, and particularly the fight against vermin and predators, claimed our attention with increasing demand. The hours spent on these tiresome duties were given all too grudgingly and every moment we could muster was devoted to our struggle for survival and scratching for fuel – now reduced to a few small twigs from the hillside or any scrap of rag or paper we might be able to pick up – and the more satisfying occupation of growing supplementary food. Even so, the queues at the block clinics stretched longer and the hospital wards became more congested as the general health of internees worsened in the face of the growing shortage of rations and medical supplies. The list for X-rays in town lengthened in like proportion and, while my name climbed slowly towards the top, Mabel's condition needed urgent attention. One of Mabel's knees had swollen badly as the result of a fall. Effusion of fluid into a knee joint can often be crippling, and as the mother of three children in camp conditions, it was only right that her turn should have prior claim.

Whilst in town, Mabel had an opportunity to see a fellow patient recovering from surgery. Mr Kayamally, an Indian businessman, owned Kayamally Building, which Mabel's architect husband had designed and in which he rented an office. Not knowing what to expect in Stanley, Mabel had, before going into camp, locked her jewel case in George Hall's office safe. She had been anxious about it for some time since; now she desperately wanted to retrieve its contents, because gold and jewellery were fetching fabulous prices on the black market. Widespread surreptitious trading with the camp guards had attracted the opportunists in our community and anyone who had anything valuable to sell could go to these 'brokers' who acted as go-betweens for the guards bringing food and military yen in exchange for permanent assets.

The situation arose from two main causes: the plight of the internees was such that they were willing to sacrifice even their most treasured possessions – or to sign IOUs – for food; and the attitude of people in town, who had lost faith in the military yen (which had absolutely no financial backing) and were hoarding sterling and even Hong Kong dollars in the hope that their value would be restored at the end of the war. Besides gold and jewellery, watches, fountain pens and cigarette cases were in demand. The yen was of value only in the camps where it could be used as currency for the purchase of the extras which made life possible. Food was still to be had but at exorbitant prices – an egg sold at 35-40 yen (approximately £10) or more, and as much as 250 yen was charged for a tin of bully beef – and people were grateful they were available at all.

Unfortunately for our mess I didn't have any jewellery with me and only sold my wedding ring. Jeanne and Ethel sold what they had. George Byrne's Rolex watch, which Ethel had no use for (he'd had it for twenty-five years and never had it serviced) fetched 40,000 yen. It kept us in peanut butter for several weeks. Horner sold a gold filling which had dropped out of his tooth – others dug theirs out. I didn't feel too badly at not being able to make a larger contribution because I continued to receive parcels from town.

On Mabel's enquiry about her husband's office, Mr Kayamally told her that the Japanese were in occupation, but everything they could not use, including her husband's safe, had been thrown into the basement where they were under his personal care. He promised to try to send in her jewel case as soon as he was discharged from hospital.



In due course the precious case arrived in the camp. Some of her jewels, as well as all the cash she had in it, had been taken but she was glad to have what was left. She had already sold her engagement ring when Michael was ill and, with the 30,000 yen she raised, had been able to arrange for the Japanese authorities to supply her with an egg a day for one month to help his recuperation. She now sold the rest gradually, sharing some of the proceeds with us whilst we in our turn gave her sweet potatoes or vegetables as we had them and, occasionally, some of my prize tomatoes.

Those who had safe deposit boxes in the banks were not so fortunate. The liquidation of enemy assets was nearing completion and we were required to sign over authority for the Japanese to open our boxes so that their contents could be sent in to us. Many protested at this but they were told that authority was a mere formality – the boxes would be forced if they did not sign. Needless to say, what came in was but a fraction of what the boxes contained.

They didn't get much from my box. Gold and diamonds had in fact been in demand before the war and Grace's husband had advised selling. Because jewellery is said never to lose its value, it was customary for relatives to give some form or other as wedding presents, and we did in fact have a number of items which were quite valuable in themselves but which we never wore. With the idea of going through my case, I had taken it out of the safe deposit box. War broke out almost immediately after, however, and I never found an opportunity during hostilities to slip down to the bank to put it away. At our capitulation the banks closed for business, and when I was ready to go into Stanley I took the case over to Horace who buried it in their garden before leaving for China and there it stayed for the duration of war. The rest of the contents of my box were supposedly sent in to me but all that was received were several Chinese war bonds which, considering the state of the economy of that country at the time, were quite worthless. Several hundred dollars in United States and Hong Kong currency as well as minor valuables disappeared in transit and, like the loss of the contents of our flat, there was nothing I could do about it.

It was only natural that, with the axis powers' decline of fortune on all fronts, conditions in city and camps should worsen as month followed long month. We were obviously being very effectively blockaded and, periodically, we would hear the droning sound of heavy aircraft, or see the bombers as they passed overhead, some-

times in search of some convoy of ships, although more often their passing would be followed by the rumble of muffled explosions which could only have been caused by their loads being dropped on targets in the city behind us.

The first air raid on Hong Kong had occurred as early as October 1942, to which the camp responded with delirious joy and excitement. Here was proof positive that we had not been abandoned: the Americans had fulfilled their promise and surely help could not now be far away. Our spirits were dampened when news came through of the sinking of the *Lisbon Maru* at about the same time. She had been torpedoed by an American submarine off the China coast. *The Hong Kong News* reported the incident in bold headlines: 'Dastardly attack by Americans on ship carrying prisoners of war.' What they did not tell, and we only heard about at the war's end, was that the *Lisbon Maru* had also carried Japanese troops and, after she had been hit, the cargo holds in which POWs were kept were battened down. After a day and a night when, without food, water or latrine facilities, the POWs at last managed to break loose on the decks, Japanese guards shot them down in cold blood. The *Lisbon Maru* carried over 1,800 POWs, many of them relatives of internees in Stanley. According to an authoritative account<sup>1</sup> of the tragedy, the survivors totalled 973 of which three escaped to Chungking and 244 died subsequently in Japan.

The next raid did not occur until almost a year later – in August 1943. From then on, though, they increased in frequency and intensity. With each successive bombing our flagging morale was boosted and we accepted the worsening conditions more cheerfully.

The heaviest (and for us the most tragic) air raid occurred in January 1945, during the coldest and hungriest spell of our captivity. Administration of the camp had been transferred to military authorities early in 1944. They were generally tougher but they did institute the communal gardens which made so vast an improvement in our diet and allowed extra rations to the men who worked in them. After early 1942, Red Cross supplies of food and medicine had brought sporadic relief to our sorry conditions, and for the relatively few who had contacts in the city the weekly food parcels had been a godsend. However, in the face of the poorer rations and intense cold of that last winter, had we not had the extra sweet potatoes grown in the camp and, for those who could afford the high prices, the increased activities of the black market, the health of

internees would have been very much worse. We were on what was known as military rations, which in fact were no more than rice and spinach alternated with spinach and rice. The name of the camp was changed to Military Internment Camp of Hong Kong and all able-bodied men were forced to sign a declaration that they would make no attempt to escape.

Monday, 15 January 1945. An air-raid alarm was sounded at 9 a.m. It had been ruled that we were to stay indoors until the 'all-clear' was given and so indoors we remained as wave after wave of heavy aircraft swept over the camp to unload their bombs on city and harbour. The sound of explosions lasted almost the whole day and when the 'all-clear' at last rang through the camp those who had counted them estimated that over three hundred planes had taken part. Our entire routine had been disrupted as we had not been allowed even to go to the kitchens for food. No one complained, however – it was too heartening to huddle around the windows and crowd in the doorways in order to catch a glimpse of the planes as they passed overhead. The more hopeful even suggested that the prolonged raid was a preliminary to an American landing on Hong Kong.

With morning came the sound of another alarm. It was only 8.30 a.m., but the sun shone brightly in the crisp cold air. The planes came back – hundreds of them. Meanwhile, guns had been mounted on the rooftops of several of the prison buildings and some claimed to have seen a mobile anti-aircraft gun on the hillside immediately below the camp. There was a small, half sunken tanker lying in Stanley Bay, guarded by a couple of salvage lighters. They appeared to present an attractive target for some of the aircraft because, instead of going on towards the city, they turned to come back. As they flew low to attack, the wings of two planes seemed to brush against one another and, horror-stricken, internees living on that side of the camp witnessed the pilots bail out. The parachute of one was caught in his damaged plane and both crashed against the hillside. The other pilot slowly descended to safety, but we heard later that he was captured and shot by the Japanese. The raid stopped at lunchtime, but not before the sky had been blackened with a pall of dense smoke rising from behind the hills, reminiscent of the Japanese attack made on us just over three years before. Target areas in city and harbour had obviously been hit. At 1.30 p.m. the planes returned. Fear had now taken the place of the excitement

of the previous day – the sight of airmen in trouble had sobered the watching internees – and yet the attacks continued. They seemed now to direct their attention to the prison, strafing the buildings with machine guns from the air. Several small bombs were dropped in the bay in close proximity, shaking all buildings in the St Stephen's compound. The guns from the prison barked incessantly while the camp guards fired revolvers and rifles at the attacking planes. The din from gunfire and explosion was continuous. Terrified children screamed as their frightened parents tried to calm them. At about 5 p.m. a tremendous explosion rocked the whole camp. We in the Indian Quarters had seen little of the action, but the explosion left us in no doubt that something nearby had been hit. Men from adjacent bungalows and from St Stephen's main building saw a dense cloud rise from one of the buildings near the cemetery and rushed towards it as loud cries for help were heard above the drone of aircraft and whine of tracer bullets. They arrived at Bungalow C, which looked to have received a direct hit, to find ten unscathed bodies lying on the lawn as if in sleep. Three more bodies were recovered from the wrecked bungalow – four women were among those who had been killed instantaneously, a fifth died on her way to hospital where five other people were admitted.

There were no coffins, of course, and the fourteen were buried in a mass grave on the following day. There was no delivery of *The Hong Kong News* on Thursday, 18 January, but a copy obtained later from the Formosan guards reported a 'barbaric' air raid by American planes on British civilians in Stanley, where white crosses clearly indicated the presence of an internment camp. Ten bombs were dropped, it said, which resulted in the death of fifteen people. Thirty-four internees had been injured. Since the bungalows were known to have held about fifty people, and Bungalow C was the only building damaged, something could perhaps be said for their arithmetic. This was probably the closest they got to the truth. No mention was made of the guns on the prison roof, nor of the anti-aircraft or rifle-fire from the ground. (The guns were removed the same night.) As for white crosses, camp labour was used *after* the bombing incident: our own men cut shallow channels along the hill-side and filled them with white clay and stones from our kaolin supply.

The children in camp never recovered from the shock of the bombing – at least not for as long as we were in Stanley. They



Victims of the air raid on 16 January 1945 when Bungalow C was accidentally bombed.

(Photographs: Rudy Khoo)

became increasingly nervous and highly strung, adding to the difficulties of daily living. When the Japanese surrendered seven months later and Allied planes swooped low over the camp in a victory salute, dropping supplies of medicine and food, they screamed in terror. We adults, of course, were thrilled to see them and welcomed the extras they brought – the women fought to claim the colourful nylon parachutes with which they hoped to replenish their depleted wardrobes – but the noise of low-flying aircraft brought back to young minds the anguish of that fateful January day. We were forced to request that the demonstrations be stopped.

To return to the series of distressing incidents which began about the middle of 1943. We had sensed a growing air of suspicion and persecution, insidious at first but becoming more intensified after the Canadians were repatriated. Some of Selwyn-Clarke's health officers and their families had joined us in May when a rumour was circulated that two senior officers of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank had escaped from town<sup>2</sup>. This was not surprising because time was running out and, once their work of liquidation was over, the banks would be wound up and the staff would be sent into Stanley from where escape was much more difficult.

The three remaining bungalows, D, E and F, on the far side of St Stephen's, which had previously been out of bounds, were now

opened for the intake of the new internees. These comprised the rest of the Medical Department staff and the bank officers and their families. Following the rumoured escapes, security within the camp was once again severely tightened and from town came more rumours of mass arrests of Chinese and neutral citizens, often on trumped-up charges. The victims were thrown either into the city gaols or brought to the nearby prison in Stanley, to be questioned and tortured and then questioned again. From some of our quarters prisoners could be seen crossing the exercise yards. When night came, one could hear scream after scream of those undergoing torture.

I was suddenly alerted to stand by for the long-awaited trip into town for the X-ray examination. From the experience of others I knew that this could be in a week's time or I might have to wait for a further three weeks, but I was happy in the knowledge that my turn had arrived at last. I went over the list of people I hoped to see and the few essentials that I planned to bring back with me when, to my great disappointment a few days later, the whole scheme collapsed. A returning ambulance was stopped at the camp entrance. It was searched. The patient was discovered to have a fortune in bank notes strapped to his person under cover of copious bandages. For whom the money was meant I never knew. Some said it was for the camp; others not so charitable insisted that it was the product of his own greed. There was probably a certain amount of truth in both theories – the tragedy was that it was discovered. That the Japanese authorities had been tipped off was beyond question; that the money was confiscated and the offender put under arrest was completely compatible with the risk he had chosen to run. Even the suspension of further X-ray excursions was understandable – but they did not stop after taking these steps. The Japanese tended to administer mass reprisals as a form of punishment and a frightening rumour, too persistent to be ignored, spread throughout the length and breadth of the camp. We waited with a horrid sense of foreboding and could only pray that the rumour was false. But the sudden appearance of Lady Grayburn and Mrs Selwyn-Clarke and her daughter dashed what faint hope we might have had. Sadly we heard it confirmed that the DMS, who had been responsible for organizing the X-ray examinations, was accused of being the main perpetrator for smuggling goods into the camps and that he and the Chief Manager of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, Sir Vandeleur

Grayburn, who presumably had supplied the cash needed for Selwyn's activities, had both been arrested.

This, too, was by no means the end. Other senior officers of the Hongkong Bank were taken and one of Selwyn's senior health officers, Dr K.C. Yeo, who was married to my youngest sister Florence, was accused of being implicated and was rounded up together with dozens of local people.

The usual method of arrest was to turn up suddenly, mostly at night, at a suspect's home and take him away without a word of explanation. He might be released after days or months of questioning or torture, usually both, or nothing at all might be heard of his fate until his body was returned to the bereaved relatives for burial. K.C. was fortunate enough to survive the ordeal which lasted many months. In due course, he became one of Selwyn's successors as Hong Kong's Director of Medical and Health Services – the first Chinese to hold the appointment. He seldom speaks of the horrors of his experience, nor would I like to press him for details even after a lapse of thirty years. It was enough to know something of the anguish and anxiety which my sister had to bear. Left to her own resources with three young children and living night and day under severe stress, she courageously refrained from leaning on other members of the family for fear of dragging them into the mire. They quietly did what they could to help her over those terrible months.

More was to come. Arrests were made in the camp. The authorities had long suspected that we had facilities for radio contact with the outside world and it was inevitable that they should pounce some day. There were spies, unfortunately, in our midst who would not hesitate to sell their fellow internees at any time in exchange for favours or food. It was only a case of waiting for the right moment.

The Defence Secretary, Mr J.A. Fraser, and the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mr W.R. Scott, who headed the Intelligence section, were the first to be taken. It was said that these two, with the assistance of radio communication available in the camp, had planned a mass escape of police which had every chance of success but, because of the possible retaliatory measures to which the women, children and babies in the camp would be subjected following their escape, they were persuaded to abandon their project. The hand of Japanese gendarmerie descended on them one morning and

they were both taken away. Mr Fraser lived in our block. He was a retiring person, well-liked and highly respected. I can still recall his iron-grey hair and kindly face and his slight, trim figure always clad in well-pressed grey shirt and khaki shorts on his way to and from the food queues. The ASP also lived in the Indian Quarters, as did the two members of the Cable and Wireless staff who operated the secret radio. After these latter two were arrested, their room was searched and sealed off. Five others were taken from other parts of the camp. All were connected with rations and the canteen. They were said to have been responsible for getting replacements and spare parts for the secret radio which were smuggled in with supplies. When so many people with such varied activities were implicated within the camp, it is not to be wondered that so many more from outside were drawn into the rapidly closing net.

The arrests stunned the camp. Protests made by our Representative of Internees were of no consequence. Requests for legal aid for the victims were ignored. Our misgivings grew graver with each hour of suspense, and in spite of the brilliant sunshine we endured some of our gloomiest days.

The only time that we saw any of the prisoners in camp again was when one of the Cable and Wireless men was brought along to the end of our block early one blazing hot afternoon. Under the supervision of grim-looking guards he was forced to dig in the hard baked soil. We were naturally curious as to what they were after but dared not stand around and stare. I climbed our private steps to peep over the corner of our roof garden and could see him sweating at his heavy task. The digging went on for most of the afternoon until a wireless set, long buried, was uncovered and taken away.

We were told that military trials had been held and that Sir Vandeleur Grayburn had been sentenced to imprisonment for a hundred days. The term had almost passed when, towards the end of August, his body was sent out without warning for burial. He had died in the prison hospital of starvation and neglect. Lady Grayburn, who was only on the other side of the prison wall, had not been advised of her husband's illness, nor had medical aid been sought.

I was working in the garden one afternoon about a month later when Mr F. Shaftain, a superintendent of the CID who lived in our block, joined me. He asked if I had sufficient knowledge of Chinese to help him with a small translation. He explained that he was in touch with underground movement with which some of his former



detectives were working. He wanted a couple of simple messages sent out to them via the ration lorry in the morning. Naturally I was happy to comply. The messages were merely instructions to pay a number of workers. It was necessary for them to be concise, he said, because they had to be transcribed on pieces of cigarette paper which he proposed to paste on the backs of matchbox trays. I took the messages and paper from him and returned them to him the same evening.

A day or two passed and Mr Shaftain came again, looking extremely grave. He thanked me for the translations and, handing me a slip of paper, asked me to consider carefully before committing myself to this further task. 'There is considerable risk attached and I won't mind if you would rather not. All I ask is for you to keep the matter to yourself.'

I read the brief message: 'Fraser and Scott sentenced to death. Others in grave danger. Request immediate intervention by British Ambassador in Chungking. Most urgent.'

I paused for a moment before saying I would very much like to do it. However, I wondered if I were the right person to entrust with so heavy a responsibility. There were Chinese scholars in government who would be far better equipped to handle such a delicate matter. What, for instance, if I failed to convey the right degree of urgency in my translation?

'Mrs. Gittins,' he replied, 'you can count the people in camp who would have sufficient knowledge of Chinese to do this on the fingers of one hand. If the message should be intercepted by the Japs – and this is by no means impossible under the circumstances – they would have no difficulty in tracing you. I don't have to tell you the consequences, but I am duty bound to warn you of the risk.' He ran his forefinger across his neck. 'There are not many who would be willing to accept the challenge. Do you still want to do it?'

I took the note without further comment and, as quickly as I could, did the translation and transcribed the few words as before. The appeal was, of course, futile – if it ever reached its destination. Anyway, we heard no more about it.

On the afternoon of 29 October 1943, a van drove out of Stanley Prison. It is said that as it passed some children playing by the main road, a hand reached out to wave at them and an English voice called, 'Goodbye, boys.' A little later internees walking by the cemetery looked down towards the beach and jetty on which they

had landed nearly two years before. They watched with interest a large group of people who had gathered by the strip of wasteland near the jetty which was normally so deserted. There were Japanese as well as other nationals. They thought they could see a few women and several British figures were recognized. There seemed to be some trenches, in front of which the people were made to kneel. Unbelievably, and to their horror and revulsion, the spectators saw thirty-two people shot dead.

We received no word of the fate of our prisoners until four days later when, on 2 November, Mr Gimson was handed a note. The names of seven – the DS, the ASP, the two wireless engineers, two of the others and a bank officer arrested in town – were listed as having paid the ultimate penalty for their offence against ‘the operation of Japanese military law’. The remaining three from the camp and another bank officer from town were to serve prison terms of ten or fifteen years. No details of the charges levelled against them were given, nor was any mention made of Dr Selwyn-Clarke.

Nine months later one of the Hongkong Bank wives was called to her husband’s bedside. He was serving a term of ten years and, like his chief before him, lay dying of malnutrition. Again, with so many of our doctors easily available, not one had been summoned to advise.

Dr Selwyn-Clarke was kept in solitary confinement. He spent many months in a detention cell under the Supreme Court in the city in which the light was so poor that he could not even see to read. Later he was sent into Stanley Prison. Bowed and limping, with flowing grey hair and beard, this pathetic shadow of the former tall and upright figure could be seen from the windows of the Married Quarters, mingling with criminals in the exercise yard. At the end of 1944 he was transferred to one of the military camps in Kowloon, where he remained until the end of the war. His health suffered but his spirit remained unbroken. He resumed office as DMS on Japan’s capitulation and paid us a brief visit at the Gloucester Hotel in September 1945 where, as workers for our ‘takeover’ government, we were billeted. True to his nature, he remarked that I was far too thin and on the following day sent me a jar of malt and cod-liver oil.

He remained in office until 1947, when he was appointed Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Seychelles. He was honoured with a CMG in 1949 and a KBE in 1951, and later joined

the Ministry of Health in London as Principal Medical Officer. In August 1969 he entertained the Yeos and me to tea at his London flat and set a table of which any Hong Kong Number One houseboy would be proud. He still limps a little, but it was heartening to see in this accomplished flat dweller the same cheerful, gracious Selwyn we had known years before.

I had a happy reunion with one of the other prisoners in Tokyo in July 1950. As head of the canteen in camp he had been arrested and sentenced to fifteen years in gaol, but at our meeting in 1950 Mr. W.J. Anderson was Hong Kong Government Representative under General Douglas MacArthur's SCAP (Supreme Commander Allied Powers). Because only military and trade personnel were allowed to go to Japan (and I was neither – all I wanted was to visit the War Cemetery), I had been issued with a special permit. M.K. Lo had arranged for me to stay in Tokyo at the home of Jardine's *taipan*, but the Government Representative was made responsible for my movements. He had known me years before when I was a guider and his wife Colony Commissioner of the Hong Kong Girl Guides Association. Despite our confrontation during the fighting in 1941, when Gordon King and I had helped ourselves to stationery from the government stores over which he presided, the years in Stanley had softened any hard feelings which either of us might have entertained. He met me at Haneda airport and put me on the plane for Hong Kong thirty-six hours later and, over a cup of coffee while waiting the plane's departure, he confided that he was rather enjoying the reversal of relationship which he now had with his former gaolers.

As far as the internee whose arrest had set off the train of unhappy events was concerned, after the grim tragedy of the executions, we were surprised to see him return to the camp apparently none the worse for his experience. Considering the harsh treatment given to the others, we could not help but wonder at the leniency with which the original offence was viewed.

---

<sup>1</sup>Hamilton, G.C., *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* (University of Hong Kong Library, 1966).

<sup>2</sup>The escapees carried with them a record of the serial numbers of the last banknotes issued by the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank before the outbreak of hostilities in 1941. This was to make subsequent issues (made by the Japanese – some HK\$19 million) easily identifiable. The Japanese issues were known as 'duress' notes but they, too, were honoured by the Bank when it resumed business at the end of the war.

## ***Chapter Fifteen***

It was as well that the bombing of Bungalow C occurred when hope was vibrant in the wake of such cheering war news, otherwise many more might have succumbed to the harsh conditions we were yet to endure before relief came. As it was, morale had sunk to its lowest ebb. This was perhaps only natural for, following the January sunshine, the days grew bleaker as winter reached its bitterest in the heavy Scotch mists and biting winds of traditional Chinese New Year weather. As well as progressively poorer rations, we faced more stringent demands as Japanese tempers shortened further with their many reverses. They knew that they were beaten yet they could not accept defeat. They grew daily more arrogant, finding fault with our every action and riling us continually for our lack of courtesy, actual or imagined. To boost their own flagging morale they forced us rain or shine to assemble daily in the open for roll call, whereas up until then it had been sufficient for each representative to answer for his block. In their absurdity they even picked on the way we stood and the manner in which we were dressed – the Camp Commandant made it his personal responsibility to teach us how to bow.

American bombers continued to fly over, intent on targets in the city, but the sight of them no longer thrilled – we were too apprehensive of a repetition of the ghastly tragedy so fresh in our minds. We did, in fact, have a further scare some months later when an unidentified plane dropped a number of what must have been practice bombs in the vicinity of St Stephen's main building, one of which pierced a ceiling and remained suspended aloft. The whole episode was shrouded in mystery and, failing to find any reason for the half-hearted attack, we immediately tried to rationalize it. We decided that the attack must have been staged by the Japanese authorities either as a hoax or, and this seemed the more likely, simply as an attempt to create friction between the Allies. The latter premise was supported by the fact that, although only slight damage

was sustained by the bomb's entry, *The Hong Kong News* reported 'an indiscriminate air attack by American bombers on defenceless Stanley Camp, rendering homeless 250 British internees'. The minor scratches received by a few from falling masonry gave the Commandant an excuse to make a personal visit to demonstrate his concern. He ordered immediate evacuation of the building, forcing its inmates to seek shelter in an exposed verandah. They were not allowed to resume residence until long after all danger had passed, and ten days elapsed before our labour squad was permitted to remove the harmless bomb which contained no explosive.

Easter came and we welcomed the milder days and soft sea breezes. Besides, we knew this would be our last Easter – we'd be out by Christmas. No longer a faint hope, this was now a certainty. Even the thought of going through the horrors of another war did little to dampen our expectation. The Japanese obviously had no intention of giving up Hong Kong without a struggle and had been making feverish preparations for some time past. Shelters and foxholes were tunnelled into the hills around us. According to the guards, defence areas were being built in the vicinity of all the camps. The prospect was disconcerting but we considered this preferable to the inaction which had been ours for so long.

In May *The Hong Kong News* brought word of the fall of Germany. From this time on it ceased to be delivered into the camp. But the Formosan guards who hated their Japanese masters were by now so friendly to us that we suffered no lack of news. We knew that Borneo had been retaken, but faraway names like Brunei Bay and Balikpapan meant little to us. Even though we had seen heavy bombers in action we still had no conception of the might and power of the Allied striking force. However, Manila's fall in July was a different matter because the Philippine Islands were only hours away: three months at the outside and Hong Kong would be free!

Meanwhile the Japanese attitude had changed imperceptibly. Arrogance gradually gave way to an apologetic attempt at friendliness. They blamed one another openly: 'Very sorry, but we are not responsible for your treatment, you know.' They told us that meat would soon be included in our rations. This we could not bring ourselves to believe until, late one Saturday evening in June, the ration lorry lumbered in without warning, bearing a large buffalo carcass. In the heat and humidity of an evening in Hong Kong's midsummer, the long-slaughtered animal, dumped unceremoniously in our midst,

demanding immediate attention, and the kitchen staffs were roused to do something before decomposition made it quite unsuitable for food. We fell asleep that night with the pleasant smell of cooking in our nostrils and dreamed of our next meal. The cooks made a special effort and, however inadequately one carcass served as rations among nearly three thousand, the unfamiliar taste of beef, after all forms of meat had been suspended for almost two years, marked an occasion we did not easily forget.

The dead buffalo heralded a weekly meat ration and we lived on in the hope of better things to come. We were impatient for the end. For three and a half years we had led a vague, perplexing and debilitating existence, not knowing where we were headed nor what the next day would bring. Human nature is strangely complex. We all reacted in different ways. I remember consoling myself often when conditions were particularly distressing with the thought that at least we didn't have to worry about our next meal. There was little else we could have consoled ourselves with. No excuse can ever justify our treatment. At the same time, at least we were given a pretence of housing and food. Many people in town, who had neither food nor shelter, would have counted themselves fortunate had they been given a modicum of what we had. Internment certainly reduced us to a state of pauperism compared to what we had been used to but somehow, when everybody suffers the same problems, one's own burden seems much lighter.

The lack of mental stimulation was more depressing. Inevitably we grew to be human machines, mechanical, apathetic, resigned. People have wondered how we kept our sanity. No one can deny that we all had our lapses. Bill Faid used to say that I was influenced by phases of the moon, but he passed this remark only in jest. There is no doubt in our minds, and this was almost an unanimous opinion, that it was the natural beauty of our surroundings that did so much for the preservation of our mental stability – that and the fact that we could laugh at ourselves. Often, when the closeness of other human beings drove one to distraction, there was escape to be found on the hillside where a moment's contemplation of nature helped restore one's peace of mind. The indestructible beauty of sea and sky, the small green islands set like gems in the blue ocean, the moonlit waters, their mirror-like calm broken only by an occasional ripple of phosphorescent surf – nature soothed and comforted with greater efficacy than any man-made drug could have done.

We heard about Russia's declaration of war on Japan in early August. On Friday 10th the authorities issued an order: every man with a technical qualification was to assemble at 2 p.m. with his family outside his block ready for immediate transfer. In a typically Japanese manner, there the order ended. An atmosphere of doubt and excitement pervaded the camp. Engineers and technicians pulled their possessions from under their beds and threw them into whatever containers they could lay hands on. No matter how little they had entered the camp with, the 'treasures' they collected had outgrown the small cases many had brought. Pandemonium broke loose as people rushed around – there were debts to be collected, farewells to be made. The rest of the camp speculated wildly. Some argued that the party was destined for Japan. Others said they were needed for the city services because the Japanese themselves were going to leave. One theory claimed that they were to be used as hostages. Whatever the intention we never found out. The transferees, over 170 in all, were packed into a junk and disappeared into the distance. Thrown into a makeshift camp in Kowloon, where conditions were far worse than those they had left behind in Stanley, all they could do was to wait. When the end came, they were still waiting.

We had finished our last meal of the day on Tuesday, 14 August, when someone started a rumour: a strange story of a terrible bomb, its flash 'brighter than a thousand suns', which had devastated Japan. Frank Fisher brought it to us from St Stephen's. Frank was full of stories and always insisted that they were true, so we listened politely to what he had to say. It was told to us in confidence and we promised not to repeat it. But the rumour, darting here and there like a glow-worm, soon spread throughout the camp. Nevertheless cries of wolf had been heard so often that no one took any real notice. The following day brought a welcome issue of free cigarettes, followed by a wonderful surprise in the form of a roll of American toilet paper for each internee. This sudden generosity, when the only toilet paper we had seen in years was of a poor-quality local manufacture made in large sheets and issued at all too rare intervals, led to further conjecture. We could scarcely believe our eyes.

*The Hong Kong News* dated Thursday, 16 August, and smuggled in by the guards, mentioned a broadcast to the nation by the Emperor of Japan. It said that, in view of the continued loss of life and because of his great love for his people, His Imperial Highness

had decided to end hostilities – a state of war no longer existed. No confirmation came from Headquarters but the authorities remained behind closed doors. Mr Gimson was summoned in the afternoon. It was he who issued a statement to the effect that Japan had accepted the terms of the Potsdam Proclamation which involved absolute surrender. The cease-fire order had been given on the day before.

We were to remain in Stanley for the time being, the statement went on to say, and administration of the camp was to continue as before. Guards would stay on patrol duty. It appealed to internees to refrain from cheering and demonstration. It was not easy to accede to this request, but restraint slowly overcame our bubbling exuberance and no incident arose to disrupt the tranquil evening. Perhaps we took a little longer than usual to settle, but when darkness crept in we went quietly to bed.

The war was over... the transition was so different to anything we had imagined: no shelling, no air raids, no excitement. Japan's sudden and total capitulation came as an anti-climax to years of fear and tension. This was an eventuality no one had expected. We hung around waiting for something to happen. For two whole days nothing did.

Sunday, 19 August, brought our first visitors from town. We had been told to expect them at around ten o'clock in the morning. Our police-officers donned what was left of their uniforms and erected a light barricade across the main road a short distance from the entrance to the camp. Internees decked themselves in their pre-war finery: suits and leather shoes for the men; women replaced their shorts and suntops with dresses – one or two even put on their hats. We stood behind the barricade ready to give our visitors a joyous welcome – so many were grateful for all the food parcels they had received over the years. We watched the bus pull up and among the first to approach were my sister Victoria and her husband M.K. They were both dressed in sombre grey cotton and provided a marked contrast to the gaiety of the internees. Our visitors hesitated uncertainly at the sight of the barrier and smiled wanly at us through the lines of weary anxiety so clearly drawn across their faces. Their smiles broadened as we shouted a greeting, but the pallor of their complexion spoke more eloquently than words could have done. In a flash we saw how deeply they had suffered. Love and compassion welled up within me – unable to contain my impatience, I slipped



under the barricade and in a moment was in their arms.

Monday, 20 August, brought a visit from Shamshuipo Camp. Here the joy of reunion was markedly restrained. Some were too ill to make the short journey. Others had been drafted to Japan. Too many had succumbed to disease and malnutrition. Sadly their poignant stories were told. I asked Mabel's husband, George Hall, how it was that Billy had come to be selected for drafting.

George explained that they wanted technically qualified people and Billy, being an engineer and fit, was an obvious choice. George felt that he need not have gone. His friends had pressed him to point out to the authorities that he was no longer a young man – Billy was in his mid-forties – and to show them his bad knee so they wouldn't take him. Billy's knee was not a true disability – he had a badly set knee-cap following a motor cycle accident in his student days and, although it used to ache at changes in weather conditions, it did not really trouble him. Billy had been stubborn, George said, maintaining that if he did not go someone else would have to fill in to make up the number they wanted. Since he had been chosen, he would take his chance. Besides, he had beaten younger men at the races conducted to test their physical fitness and had scaled the hurdles with ease. He must have been very fit. I was proud that he had stood by his principles – although, had he listened to his friends, he might have been with me today.

The other camps had their turn. A launch was placed at their disposal and, day after day, there were visits from husbands, fathers, sons and sweethearts. Each morning a busload of people came in from town, bringing with them greetings and goodwill and food. My sister Florence and her husband K.C. were among those who visited me as well as some of the family servants. They wept to see me again. Young Hohlov, the Russian student, walked the long miles to Stanley and back because he was too impatient to wait for a place on the bus; he brought a pan of curried chicken, a gift from one of the Indian students.

It was all very well for relatives and friends to visit us and naturally we enjoyed their visits, but it was not long before the novelty wore off and we found it increasingly frustrating to be bound within the confines of the camp. At the same time, with the situation in Hong Kong as it was reported to be – and we had no reason to doubt the authenticity of the stories which were told to us – many were forced to admit that we were better off where we

were. Besides the problem of transport – there were no longer cars or buses in the city, as they had long been shipped for scrap metal to Japan – it would be too heartbreaking to see the widespread devastation that the Japanese occupation had brought: the wrecked homes and buildings, the neglected public services and the depleted population (a mere six hundred thousand left from a pre-war total of over one and a half million) for whom no law or order now existed.

Nevertheless, there were those who thought they could turn back the clock and resume their lives and businesses from where they had left off. Someone had a brainwave: whilst the bus waited for the visitors, could not internees be given an opportunity to make a brief visit to the city to begin picking up the threads? Mr Sloss, our Vice-Chancellor, was appointed adjudicator on the question of priority. On hearing this, I decided at once that I had to return the visits of my family and, feeling certain of a sympathetic hearing, rushed to get myself placed on an early list.

I met with disappointment. Mr Sloss insisted that priority had to be given to business people whose future livelihood might depend upon their making an early visit: much as he wanted to help me, he could not allow personal reasons to influence his judgement. I could see that he was sorry and I should have known that he could not have done otherwise, and yet I felt terribly let down.

Disappointment, though, was short-lived. My friend, Mr Shaftain of the CID, learnt of my disappointment and offered me a lift in the police car – and so I spent the following day with the family.

British planes flew over on 29 August – the Royal Navy had arrived! On Thursday 30th, Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt, newly appointed Commander-in-Chief and Governor of Hong Kong, visited us in a jeep. We had not seen or even heard of this new vehicle, reputed to have killed more Americans than the war itself. The whole camp turned out to welcome him. Flags of all the nations represented in camp were hoisted and broken and, as they fluttered in the light afternoon breeze, we humbly thanked God for deliverance. Nor did we forget those who had given their lives in battle and in captivity. The Admiral spoke briefly and, as the bugle notes died away, we looked up to see the white ensign fly proudly over Headquarters. It had replaced the Japanese flag.

On 1 September all Japanese nationals were ordered off Hong



Inspecting a naval jeep.

Kong Island. For their own protection, the men were detained temporarily in barracks and prisons in Kowloon. Japanese women and children assembled at Queen's Pier, ready to be deported.

Meanwhile, until a new government could be formed, the administrative vacuum had to be filled by a 'takeover' body. The Colonial Secretary (soon to be Sir Franklin Gimson), instead of being Representative of Internees, was once again the King's Representative. He was made Lieutenant Governor. He summoned key government officials from Stanley to assist in the task of rehabilitating the chaotic conditions. Mr Sloss was reinstated as Censor-in-Chief. This had been a war-time appointment which he had held simultaneously with that of Vice-Chancellor but, with the University almost a complete wreck because of shelling and subsequent looting, he could now give censorship his full attention. He took his secretary, May Witchell, into town with him. Almost immediately they sent for me.

I left Stanley Camp on Monday, 3 September, with about twenty government servants. As the bus climbed the hill to join the main



Nor did we forget.  
(Courtesy of G.C. Emerson)

road, I turned for a last look at the scene I had come to know so well. The panorama below was alight with morning sunshine. Stanley peninsula stood out. The drabness associated with camp life was momentarily forgotten and in its place was the sparkling brightness of the beach resort we had known before the war. A gently rising mist strangely softened the outlines of bays and islands although each landmark was clearly defined. Stanley had been our prison for three and a half long years but, now that I was leaving, I felt conscious of a tinge of regret. The years had been filled with hardship and sorrow, but we had found compensation in shared troubles which had bonded us through every crisis. The years held memories I would not want entirely to forget.

## *Epilogue*

As we drove through the once familiar streets that morning in September 1945, we looked around us with keen interest. Three years, eight months and five days had elapsed since our surrender on that fateful Christmas afternoon in 1941. Until our liberation a few days before, Hong Kong had endured a succession of dreary nights followed by even drearier days marked by hunger, fear and blasted hopes while she waited for deliverance. Now that it was all over count could be taken of the wreckage: Hong Kong had been left in a shocking state of neglect. Misery and chaos characterized the former carefree city. Streets were dirty and deserted. There was a total absence of public transport – in fact, hardly a single public utility functioned – and military personnel and government officials went about in their jeeps. An odd shop was open but shoppers looked drab and confused. Pale, sad faces peered from behind upstairs windows. People seemed unable to rid themselves of the habit of looking behind before they spoke.

Having driven straight through from Stanley, we had seen nothing of the residential districts of the Peak and the mid-levels, but confirmation was soon given that all houses formerly occupied by foreigners were mere shells. What war had not damaged, looting had. Furniture and fittings were gone and every vestige of woodwork had been torn off for firewood. Iron and copper piping, stripped from the walls, had left plumbing disconnected and damaged. It would take years to rebuild and refurnish. No wonder internees were given no option but to remain in camp.

We arrived at the Gloucester Hotel which had been set aside for housing members of the essential services. There was an officers' club on the top floor, the driver told us. In a daze I walked in to find May Witchell waiting for me. She took me up to our room – carpets and curtains, beds with inner spring-mattresses and a private bathroom with running hot water. Were these luxuries really for us?

Mr Sloss's office was situated in the same building, a couple of

floors below. I can't remember now what work we did during those hectic days, but it was wonderful to be busy again. We felt privileged to have been called to assist. People were in and out of the office continually. We listened to their problems and tried to reassure them that these would soon be solved. Mr Sloss held a number of press conferences. There seemed to be pressmen everywhere as details of the government's rehabilitation programme were released. Everything that was given out had to be checked and rechecked. Ever since the surrender there had been a great deal of confusion over money: everyone was suspicious of the military yen yet no one wished to part with their Hong Kong dollars which, in any case, were not the official currency. With no buying and selling, life was almost at a standstill. I remember the night the currency was stabilized: press representatives were locked in until a decision was reached and at midnight they were called into conference. By morning the military yen had become illegal tender and the Hong Kong dollar, at its pre-war level, had been reinstated.

It was a busy time and, in the rush of intense activity, tension took control of brains unused to work. The sudden change in diet, too, was more than digestive systems could tolerate. Bread, powdered milk and tinned meat replaced the spinach and rice we had grown accustomed to for years, but food no longer appealed. Cigarettes and chocolates were lavished on us. We took them because of their novelty but I doubt that they were really enjoyed. The combination of mental and digestive disturbance produced an insomnia made worse by a plague of mosquitoes. Because of neglect to drainage systems, mosquitoes were breeding under the office blocks. It was impossible to sit quietly in the evening and we sought escape under mosquito nets to court the sleep that would not come. If we did manage to fall off to sleep in the early hours, the faint stirrings of the post-war city would be enough to shatter the restless dozing that comes with dawn.

We waited anxiously for news from Japan. None came. The war had ended too suddenly even for lists of POWs from the various camps to be compiled. We were told later by those who came back that the Japanese kept no records whatsoever, and it was not until a person died that note was made of his name and unit number and, after cremation, his ashes would be placed in a shrine. However, cables came from families in Australia and, among them, was one from Elizabeth. 'Longing to come home,' she said, in addition to

words of deep affection. Nothing could have delighted me more than the knowledge that, in spite of the long separation, she still longed to come home. The little girl who left us had grown into a young woman. She would be fifteen now – I wondered if she were attractive.

The Royal Navy brought with it a young rating who walked into the office one day, placed his arms around me and kissed me on both cheeks. It was Billy's young nephew, John Fisher, and I hadn't known him. He told me that he had joined the Navy after leaving school in England, hoping that he would be sent east. This is exactly what they did. As able-seaman on HMS *Deer Sound*, John Fisher had first been sent to Sydney where he had met up with his mother – even she had not known him – and then to Hong Kong with the relieving force.

Each day a fresh lot of former residents arrived back from China or India. This was wonderfully exciting. They all looked so well and robust. Among the first was Professor Lindsay Ride who had escaped from Shamshuipo Camp during the earliest days and had organized Hong Kong's resistance group. He was now a full Colonel and wore the red cap of a Staff Officer. With him was a young officer, Ronald Holmes, who, I was told, had married John Fisher's sister in Australia. A former Civil Servant, he had fought with the Volunteers in the Battle for Hong Kong but, being in a unit whose job it was to harass enemy communications behind their advance, he was never taken prisoner. He and his party witnessed the final Japanese assault on Hong Kong from the Kowloon hills. They then turned and made their way into China where he joined Ride's resistance group. After the war, Ride naturally returned to the University and eventually succeeded Mr Sloss as Vice-Chancellor. He was knighted in 1962. Ronald Holmes resumed his civilian role: a Chinese scholar, he was to become one of Hong Kong's most distinguished Civil Servants. In the New Year Honours of 1973 he, too, was awarded a knighthood.

Gordon King joined us a few days later. He brought first-hand news of Elizabeth and John in the form of a letter from his wife, enclosing recent photographs. I could not even begin to thank Mary King for the loving care she had bestowed on the children in the uncertainty of the past years. I could hardly wait to see her. Gordon told me that Mary, who was herself a doctor, had been recalled and was even now on her way back to Hong Kong. She had arranged for

temporary guardianship of the children – her own as well as mine – and they were in good hands. I began to count the days before we could be reunited, although I realized that Billy came first. His need would most certainly be greater. Until I knew how he was and where he would be sent, I would wait in Hong Kong.

I hadn't bargained for a new regulation – nor for Mr Sloss. The new regulation required us to produce certificates of fitness before we were permitted to stay. Feeling sure that this was purely a matter of routine, I attended the Medical Department for examination. I was astounded to find that they would not even look at me. My previous medical history, they said, precluded any possibility of my working in Hong Kong after years of internment. I felt that surely this was some official blunder and went straight to Mr Sloss, only to find that he was on their side.

Ignoring the fact that it was my intention to wait for Billy, he remarked that since I couldn't clear the health regulation I had better go to the HKVDC Adjutant to see about travelling to Australia and the children. He did promise, though, that if I left several letters addressed to Billy, he would personally see to it that wherever Billy was sent there would be a letter waiting for him.

That was the best I could do. I later found that, in conspiracy with Selwyn, Mr Sloss had engineered the whole plan. He had heard that Billy had not survived internment in Japan, but, as there was nothing official to support what he had heard, he could not feel justified in telling me. At the same time he realized the futility of my waiting in Hong Kong for word from Billy which, he felt sure, would never come. He determined to get me away as soon as possible.

I had no alternative but to call on the Adjutant who further complicated a difficult situation. He was unwilling to send me away, he said, until he had finalized matters regarding my support in Australia. A wave of frustration brought on a violent flood of tears and this so alarmed the Adjutant – especially as the Vice-Chancellor had telephoned to say that I was unwell – that he offered to place me on the first hospital ship to ensure that I would be well looked after both on the journey and on arrival in Australia.

Naturally I could not accept such preferential treatment when it was not necessary. As a compromise he arranged for me to travel on HMS *Vindex* scheduled to sail a day later. The one bright spot, as far as I could see, was that Horner Smith, who was filling in time at the Harbour Office, would be travelling with me. He had told me only



that morning that he was to leave on HMS *Vindex*.

There were not many of the family left in Hong Kong. Grace and the others, as well as the rest of the Gittins family, were still in China. I was sorry to miss them, especially Grace – we had always been very close. I didn't see my father either. He was still in Macau and was quite inaccessible in the short time before I was to leave. In any case, I did not think I would be away for long; it would only be a matter of meeting up with Billy and the children – perhaps a brief holiday with them – and we would all be home again.

But Vic and M.K., and Florence and K.C. were there. Horner walked me up to say goodbye and we spent an evening with each family. I was anxious to know how the children had fared. The Lo girls had, of course, gone into China with Grace but their young son appeared to have weathered the storm reasonably well. He had taken up stamp collecting and was quietly fixing stamps into an album. T.S. Lo is now Executive Counsellor and head of Lo and Lo, Solicitors. The Yeo children, however, looked pathetic. The years of insecurity and privation had left them cowed and undernourished. I wondered at the time if they would ever recover their health, but no permanent damage resulted. In fact, their achievements have been quite outstanding and only go to show what natural ability fostered by parental care can do in spite of early setbacks. Their son is a consultant surgeon in Britain and, as for Wendy, the youngest, she is an artist of exceptional skill: I am indebted to her for the drawings in this book.

HMS *Vindex* was a small aircraft carrier converted from a merchant ship for service with the Royal Navy. She had been hurriedly refitted to evacuate POWs and was berthed in the Royal Naval Dockyard. Mr Sloss himself took me on board. He saw to it that I had a single-berth officer's cabin. I found out later that most passengers shared six- and eight-berth cabins, and the rest had camp stretchers set up on the mess deck. The remnants of Australia's *Gull Force*, who had been interned in Hainan Island, were accommodated in the hanger on the flight deck. Before handing me over to Horner's care, Mr Sloss patted me on the shoulder:

'Good luck Jean,' he said. 'Whatever happens don't lose your courage. And remember, my dear, there are many in Hong Kong who will be thinking of you.'

*Vindex* sailed in the early hours of Monday, 18 September, and, after picking up internees from Stanley, left immediately for

Australia. We leant over the ship's side, idly watching the flying fish dart out and skim over the water. I looked forward to reunion with my immediate family and the resumption of our interrupted lives. I realized things would never be the same, but at least we would be together – nothing must part us again. A cloud passed overhead and cast a shadow on the blue ocean: I felt a sudden chill.

I confessed to Horner that I was terrified of the future, but Horner, who was so often depressed, was now cheerfulness itself. He reminded me how wonderful it was to be free. Because he had been a ship's master, the Captain of HMS *Vindex*, Commander J.D.L. Williams, R.N., made a special fuss over him. This pleased him tremendously. Besides, he loved being on, instead of just looking at, the sea again.

'You will arrive in Sydney to find Billy waiting for you. See if you don't,' he predicted with conviction and led me to the bar to show some appreciation of all the attention the officers were heaping on us.

It seemed ungracious not to respond, so I set aside my fears and lived for the present. I would not have been human had I not enjoyed the voyage. We had our meals with the officers in the Ward Room, were supplied with free cigarettes and drinks. We were each given £5 of real money and entertained with radio and films at night. We were taken on a tour of inspection of the ship: down to the engine room where the Engineer-Commander proudly showed us his shining diesel engines, and up to the bridge where the intricacies of the new radar equipment were explained. Having been exposed to the plague of mosquitoes in Hong Kong, I soon went down with malarial fever, but the Surgeon-Commander recognized the symptoms immediately and a course of quinine soon put me on my feet. I was asked if I would care to do some typing for the Australian Colonel who had commanded *Gull Force* in the AIF. He had kept careful records of the experiences of his men in action and in captivity and he wanted this information to be made official. He wished as well to write to relatives of his officers, non-commissioned officers and men who had died in captivity. I was happy to be of assistance and in doing so gained an insight into the sufferings of others whose lot had been so much worse than ours. The shocking condition of the men in the carrier's hanger was living proof of the cruel treatment they had received in their prison camp, which had been one of the worst in the Pacific area. I worked in the Captain's suite, which had been given over to the Colonel for his exclusive

use, and was among the few invited to dine with the Officer Commanding the RAF at Manus Island when we called for a brief visit. He was a friend of Commander Williams and he arranged for my first ever flight in an aeroplane, a little home-made machine which the RAF, when they took over Manus Island, had swapped with the Americans for a case of Scotch whisky. I had never thought I would fly, but it was a thrill I was to live over again and again.

In no time at all the voyage was over. Suddenly we had entered the Heads and were sailing up Sydney Harbour to be welcomed by cheers and sirens which greeted us from every side. Small craft of every description had come out to meet us and, following us like the fleet of an armada, sailed with us towards our berth at Piermont. It was a rousing reception. From the flight deck we had a magnificent view of Sydney and its fine-looking bridge against a background of wooded hills and blue waters sparkling in brilliant spring sunshine. Hope and expectation ran high, but to many it was tinged with a natural trepidation. For my own part, I brushed aside my fears and looked towards the future in blind faith. I was not to know then that Mr Sloss had already received intimation of the tragedy that was to be mine and had, in fact, tried to prepare me for the ordeal which was to come. He had taken matters into his own hands and did what he thought was best for me: he bundled me off to Australia so that I would be with the children when I heard the news.

I did not visit the camp again until a year later when, on a recuperative trip to Hong Kong, I took some Australian friends on a tour of inspection. We followed the path that led through the Indian Quarters. I had told them about my garden and wanted them to see it for themselves. Stopping by our block of flats I tried to get my bearings, but something was different. I looked and I looked. Puzzled and astonished, I couldn't understand why there was not a trace of the garden. I could not believe that in less than twelve months the undergrowth had taken over – my garden was no more.

If you're looking for your tomatoes, Mrs Gittins, you'd have to fetch an axe!' The strange voice startled me. His face was vaguely familiar. To my friends he said: 'She grew the finest tomatoes in the camp.'

I flushed with pleasure as he told them about my garden. As he spoke, I remembered that he had been one of the officers of Stanley Prison before the war and I guessed that he was back at his job. This time Mr Grindley was guarding Japanese war criminals.

It is not war but its aftermath that imposes so relentless a demand on fortitude and endurance. In time of war we are buoyed up by a spirit of dedication and supported by the prop of comradeship. When it is over and we are left to our own resources, we might well wonder when things go wrong if our sacrifices have been worthwhile. Peace brought its own problems. In the years of weary rehabilitation following internment, many ex-internees faced trials and crises of a different nature and often these were more testing than the ones they had met in the camp. Many faced them alone.

For my own part, my longed-for reunion with the children was marred by the shattering news of widowhood which met me on arrival in Sydney. The blow left me stunned, confused and terribly afraid. However, Elizabeth and John opened a way to purposeful living, and, although I carried the after-effects of malnutrition, my general health was relatively unimpaired. Many were left with neither of these mercies. Eventually, I felt conscious of an overwhelming impatience to put myself to the test. I had no hesitation in deciding that Hong Kong was no place for children – we would stay on in Australia until they were educated.

This thought sustained me. Even so, as time wore on, responsibilities of single parenthood, anxiety about finance and housing and, most difficult of all, learning to live with myself in a changed situation, often undermined whatever courage I possessed. Though the children responded wonderfully, and each time I foundered in despair some out-stretched hand would lead me back to greater effort, the early postwar years stand out as a time of lonely struggle in a land in which all was strange.

In time one tends to remember only those situations which are more pleasant. In 1969 I met again for the first time an ex-internee now living in England. Lucille Eichenbaum (now Currie) had occupied the bed next to mine in Tweed Bay Hospital. All I remembered of her was that she gave me a hairbrush when she saw the one I brushed my hair with had long lost its useful function. All she could remember was the occasional tomato I brought her after I was discharged. Small things indeed, but they stand out in the memory of shared misfortune.

‘I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy  
on the recovery of my freedom, ... But my pride

was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind, by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion.'

Gibbon, E., *Autobiography*, p.205.